Sally Leukefeld: From cancer patient to cancer survivor

When Sally Leukefeld first found the lump in her left breast, she didn’t go immediately to the doctor. Instead, she waited about a month. “I already had an appointment scheduled, and I guess I was in denial,” she said.

Once she did tell her doctor at UK HealthCare about the lump, however, things moved fast. “I showed her, and within 15 minutes – literally 15 minutes – there was a team there from the Markey Cancer Center to do a needle biopsy.”

Cancer is scary enough, she said, without having to wait weeks for an appointment just to find out for sure. “I can’t imagine how awful it would be to have to wait like that.”

Sally, who’s been seeing UK HealthCare doctors since she and her husband moved to Lexington in 1990 said, “I don’t think that kind of fast turnaround is available anywhere else, certainly not anywhere around here.”

Soon Sally was at the Markey Cancer Center, meeting with an oncologist and having a lot of tests. “It was a golfball-size tumor. They did MRIs and ultrasounds to see what it was and try to determine whether it had spread to the lymph nodes under my arm.”

A few weeks later they were scheduling surgery.

“I always felt like I was in the best possible hands.”
“The staff was pretty remarkable. You had your own assigned nurse with whom you could talk at any time and ask questions, you had their number. Jeffrey was mine and he was absolutely unbelievable.”

They took such good care of her, she said, that “I was OK before I knew I wasn’t OK.”

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The tests showed Sally’s cancer was encapsulated—it had not spread beyond the tumor, and so a lumpectomy was scheduled. “It wasn’t awful,” she said of the surgery.

She couldn’t say the same for chemotherapy, however. Still, the Markey staff did everything they could to make her treatments as easy on her as they could.

“Every time I walked in there, the nurses would ask me all these questions. And, you know, you wouldn’t feel comfortable going in and listing every single thing you’re feeling, but they would ask and so I would talk about everything and I really felt like I was being taken care of.

“I told them about my fear of nausea and they worked really hard to keep that from happening to me.”

She also chose to do radiation therapy, which she found more tolerable than the chemo, to increase her odds of beating the cancer.

Today, Sally is finished with her treatments. She thinks of herself, she says, as a person who had cancer, not someone who has cancer.

She remains a big champion of the Markey Cancer Center and the people who work there. “I never thought of going anywhere else. I always felt like I was in the best possible hands. I got every treatment possible to strengthen my odds.”

To see Sally’s full story, visit ukhealthcare.uky.edu/sally or call 800-333-8874 for information.