Audrey Robinson could have gone anywhere for her cancer care; she chose UK HealthCare

Nine years ago, Audrey Robinson went into a local hospital for an appendectomy. But when she woke up, she learned her problem was not her appendix at all. It was something much worse.

Audrey had colon cancer. Her colon had perforated and the cancer had spread to nearby areas. That's what was causing her pain.

The situation was bad.

“I was too medicated when I woke up to be upset,” said Audrey, now 79. “But my family was pretty upset.”

“She’s the healthiest person I’ve ever been around and the last person I ever thought would get cancer,” said her husband, Don. “So I was shocked and I was devastated.”

“People were surprised because I ate right, I was active, I did all the things I was supposed to do – ate my broccoli, so to speak, and yet I got cancer,” Audrey said. “But my parents both had cancer. I think if I’d been more diligent in getting a colonoscopy, this maybe wouldn’t have evolved to the extent that it did.”

Advanced cancer care, right here at home

Audrey and Don considered some out-of-state cancer centers for her treatment.

(continued)
“If you have a serious problem, you try to find the best place you can possibly go to. That was our direction, to try to find the best care as quickly as possible,” Don said.

But a friend from Pennsylvania told them they had a top-of-the-line cancer center right in their own back yard in the UK Markey Cancer Center.

“I was thinking do we need to go to New York or Vanderbilt, and my friend said you have as good a place right there in Lexington,” Don said.

The friend introduced the Robinsons to his own doctor, who was director of the UK Markey Cancer Center at the time. And he referred the pair to Dr. Philip DeSimone.

“And that’s where we’ve been ever since, and we’ve been really well served,” Don said.

“Markey encouraged us to ask questions and learn so we could be participants. It’s hard to do when you’re concerned about being sick but maybe that falls to the caregiver,” Audrey said.

Over the 10 years since her treatment began, Audrey has undergone a number of procedures, including multiple rounds of chemotherapy and radiation and several surgeries.

Doctors have found cancer in her lungs and her liver at various times, and she’s once again battling cancer in her lungs.

She’s been lucky, she said, that she has a good support system in Don and in her three grown children, who also live in Lexington. She also has one grandchild, who helps keep her spirits up, she said.

Their battle continues, but Audrey and Don are in the fight together.

“(Don) aided in my recovery by being there for me, lovingly, taking care of my daily needs. Just was there and was a spokesman for me when I was in the hospital and wasn’t very articulate. The caregiver has to ask the questions because the patient often doesn’t have the perspective.”

Throughout her battle with cancer Audrey has continued her Zen mediation practice as well as that of Central Shaolin Martial Arts, a discipline she began in her mid-50s, which emphasizes strong internal energy practices and awareness.

It has greatly helped her rebound.

“I had this activity to go back to, that was an incentive to get out of bed and get better,” she said.

“One has to be reminded when you’re feeling down and out that it’s not a good place to stay, because it can get very comfortable.”

Together each step of the way

There have been no easy answers for Audrey’s cancer, but Dr. DeSimone and the Markey Cancer Center have been with her each step of the way.

“Having a trusting, caring relationship with your doctor is really important,” Audrey said. If there’s not always an answer, it’s even more important that you have faith in the care you’re receiving. That trust is the best thing that’s happened with our relationship with Markey, she said.

Don agreed. “I felt really confident with Markey medicine, with the new leadership and the direction it’s going. As a patient it’s really exciting that it’s become a national cancer center, and it does nothing but encourage you that you’re going to get better. It’s very encouraging and very exciting to have that caliber and quality of medicine right here. It’s fantastic.

“We’re so lucky to have it. It’s an excellent place.”