

# STEP BY STEP

Step by Step **Feature**

NEW PROGRAM  
GUIDES  
UNDERSERVED  
PATIENTS FROM  
BREAST CANCER  
SCREENING  
TO TREATMENT.



**F**aye Daniels never thought she had to worry about breast cancer. In fact, last fall, when she attended a local health fair in Walterboro, she skipped the crowded breast cancer awareness booth. After all, the results of her other screenings – from blood sugar levels to body mass index – revealed that she seemed to be a perfectly healthy 58-year-old.

The next day, Daniels took her daughter to the health fair for similar screenings. While she was waiting, Doris Miller, a member of various boards at Hollings Cancer Center and a breast cancer awareness advocate, approached her with information about the disease. Daniels admits that at the time, the conversation drifted over her without truly sinking in. But Miller, who lost her daughter to breast cancer, gently persisted and nudged Daniels to sign up for her first mammogram.

The following week, before she had a chance to schedule an appointment, Daniels was tackling chores at the dining room table late one night. She happened to rub her chest and felt a jolt of fear when her fingers stumbled over a large lump in her left breast.

“I don’t know how in the world I had missed it before,” says Daniels, a busy homemaker and grandmother who also travels each week to take care of her mother in Georgia. “I just sat there and couldn’t believe it. It didn’t hurt, but I knew right away that it was serious.”

The next day, Daniels felt overwhelmingly grateful as she pulled out all of the breast cancer information from Doris Miller. Without realizing it, Miller had empowered Daniels to take charge of her health. She scheduled a diagnostic mammogram and ultrasound, and results revealed a malignancy that later was diagnosed as Stage III breast cancer.

While Daniels says she felt at peace with the diagnosis, thanks to the unwavering support of her faith in God and family,

other worries descended. Because she is uninsured, she did not know how should would manage to pay the inch-thick stack of bills that flooded her mailbox.

Debbie Bryant, R.N., MSN, manager of Hollings Cancer Center’s Breast Health Outreach Program, stepped in to help. She oversees the Center’s new Avon Breast Health Patient Navigation Program, funded by a \$332,000 grant from the Avon Foundation. The innovative program serves uninsured, low income and underserved women with breast cancer across the state, ensuring they receive timely, thorough and high quality care.

Bryant, along with two lay navigators, Silvia Martin and Mechelle Jackson, and patient care coordinator Felicia Williamson,

*(continued on next page)*

*Top left clockwise: Dr. Megan Baker Ruppel, the Medical Director for Comprehensive Breast Care at HCC, Debbie Chatman Bryant, manager of the HCC Breast Outreach Program and Ms. Faye Daniels of Walterboro a breast cancer patient in the patient navigator program, with her daughter Rhene Brazell.*

guide women through the complex health care system, assisting with a vast range of issues, including completing financial paperwork, arranging reliable transportation, ensuring follow-up care and providing emotional reassurance.

“This program helps eliminate some of those barriers that keep women from coming in to get screened and treated early,” says Bryant, pointing to statistics that show that although more Caucasian women are diagnosed with breast cancer, African American women in particular are diagnosed later and die at earlier stages from the disease. “A lot of times, trust is an issue. So if you have someone who is going to work with you one on one, who is going to be there when you call, who doesn’t make you feel intimidated and who can help you understand what is happening, then you might be more likely to get what you need. We may really be able to change those statistics.”

The patient navigation program adds a new dimension to the Center’s comprehensive breast care program. While all patients, regardless of need, are followed by a breast cancer nurse coordinator to ensure seamless care, the patient navigators fill a distinct role.

“It’s well recognized, not just here but nationally, that there are patients with unique needs and specific challenges that exceed the ability of a nurse coordinator to fulfill,” says Megan Baker Ruppel, MD, the Center’s medical director for the breast care program. “Some needs can be as basic as not having a phone to get the reminders about appointments or not having a stable address for mailings. There are some concrete examples that can present difficult challenges to get people where they need to go.”



The Avon Foundation check was presented to Dr. Andrew Kraft, Director Hollings Cancer Center, by Rick Nichols, Avon Division Sales Manager.



Ms. Faye Daniels and Ms. Debbie Bryant address the crowd at the Avon Foundation press conference.

Dr. Baker Ruppel says community outreach is a key component. “All of those challenges are made worse if we don’t have a presence in the community that gives us credibility and demonstrates sincerity. If patients don’t feel they are going to be treated well, or treated on equal footing, then they’re less likely to come to us. So one of the main goals of the program is to continue to establish a community presence that says we’re there, we’re part of what’s going on around them, and their needs are incredibly important to us.”

“The NIH (National Institutes of Health) has made a strong endorsement of the patient navigator concept,” says David

Cole, MD, head of surgical oncology and general surgery at MUSC. “So we are in a unique position to say, what does this mean for South Carolina? How will this be useful to patients? We’re in the process of pulling together specific ways to measure its value. The NIH and NCI (National Cancer Institute) have a strong interest in addressing breast cancer disparities in terms of outcomes and access. We would like to show how the program makes a difference.”

Daniels became one of the patient navigation program’s first clients last November. Bryant helped expedite her Medicaid paperwork, arranged timely appointments and provided a stable, comforting presence as Daniels went through testing and began chemotherapy.

“One day, I went up for a chest x-ray, and there were problems because of my financial status,” Daniels remembers. “Deb had given me her card and said to call if I ever had a problem. When I called, she was there in two minutes. She went to the window and took care of it. She is so sweet, so efficient. She’ll come by when I’m waiting for an appointment, just to see how I’m doing.

She’s been instrumental in helping me through the financial end of this.”

Now a staunch advocate for annual mammograms and early detection, Daniels exudes strength, grace and gratitude as she moves into the next steps of her treatment, which may include surgery and radiation. “There was a line in a cancer brochure that said, why me? And I say, why not me? Everybody has something to deal with, and if this is my portion, then so be it. I’ve never been treated better in my entire life. I can’t praise or thank MUSC and Hollings Cancer Center enough.”