

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

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Local woman touts benefits of breast cancer screening

By Ashley D Swanson

Hastings, Neb – When she went in for her regular mammogram screening for breast cancer, Carissa Uhrmacher did not expect something abnormal to show up on her results.

“I went in for just a regular mammogram and didn’t think too much about it because I’d had mammograms starting at 40,” Uhrmacher, of rural Hastings, said.

Following her mammogram, she was called back in for a needle biopsy. A week later, on Sept. 28, 2021, at the age of 47, Uhrmacher was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Uhrmacher had no prior medical issues that might suggest something was wrong, nor did she have any family history of breast cancer, but she knew how important the screenings were.

“I had a grandmother with lymphoma but not breast cancer, and a grandmother with a different kind of cancer—colon cancer—so I guess I knew that screenings were really important,” she said. “It’s just something that I felt like I should continue to do.”

“Early detection was very important for my breast cancer journey,” Uhrmacher said, adding that when they first found the cancer it was small, but it grew rapidly and eventually moved into her chest wall and lymph nodes.

Uhrmacher stressed the importance of getting a mammogram, for those who are of age to get one, and especially for those who have a family history of cancer. “I think that’s really important on early detection,” she added.

The National Breast Cancer Foundation (NCFB) suggests women 40 and older should have a mammogram every one or two years, while women who are younger than 40 and have risk factors for breast cancer should talk to their health provider about when and how often they should get a mammogram.

For many people, getting a mammogram can be scary, but Uhrmacher says it’s important for people not to assume they will know how the mammogram will feel or what it will be like, because it’s a simple process.

Urmacher gave an example of a friend who had a history of cancer in her family but was afraid of having mammogram screening. “She told me right after [my] diagnosis that she had scheduled

hers and she went in and got hers and then she said, ‘of course that was so easy. Why did I wait?’ I thought it was great that she’d gone in and done that and it was good for her.”

According to the American Cancer Society, early detection, including monthly breast self-exams and scheduling regular breast exams and mammograms, leads to a higher survival rate.

Self-examinations for women and men should be done on a monthly basis and, when doing so, they should look for anything that feels abnormal on their breast/chest, such as a lump, tenderness, thickening or any other changes. Should a person find a lump, the NCBF suggests making an appointment with a medical provider and not to panic, because eight out of 10 lumps are not cancerous.

Although monthly self-examinations are necessary and can be helpful in early detection, the NCBF Foundation states “mammography can detect tumors before they can be felt, so screening is key for early detection.”

Uhrmacher’s journey was anything but a straight shot, especially with the cancer growing as fast as it was, but she wasn’t alone in her journey.

“I think the support really helped me all the way along the process,” she said. Everyone from her family, friends, church congregation, colleagues, and the teams at Mary Lanning and the Morrison Cancer Center in Hastings were there to support her from the start.

“You just take one day...my husband was very good about one day at a time and one decision at a time. Don’t think too far ahead and just go with it. My family was supportive with humor and just being there,” she said.

One year later, after eight chemo rounds over 16 weeks and 20 radiation treatments, Urmacher shared some good news: the results of her recent yearly mammogram came back as “clear”.

To listen to Carissa talk about the importance of breast cancer screening, visit the South Heartland District Health Department website: southheartlandhealth.ne.gov. To learn more about breast cancer screening, or to find out if you are eligible for assistance to cover the cost of screening, residents of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties may visit the website or contact SHDHD at 402-462-6211.

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