



Beating Cancer with a Collaborative Team of Surgeons and the Extraordinary Will to Live

After losing weight and undergoing traditional chemotherapy and radiation treatment, physicians at The University of Arizona Cancer Center at St. Joseph's told Roxanne Camp that her stage 3 cervical cancer required a rare and high-risk procedure, called pelvic exenteration. Roxanne's procedure would involve the removal of the organs in her pelvic cavity, including the colon, rectum, bladder, ovaries, uterus, cervix, and vagina. The procedure would leave her with a 33 percent chance of survival.

Even though this radical surgery would lead her to life with permanent urostomy and colostomy bags, external pouches that collect fecal matter and urine, Roxanne was determined to remain in life with her three beautiful daughters.

The complex procedure required a team of specialists working side by side—collaboration that is the hallmark of The University of Arizona Cancer Center at St. Joseph's. Colorectal surgeon Ronald Gagliano,

MD, FACS, FACRS, and urologist Ali Borhan, MD, worked alongside two gynecologic oncologists to perform Roxanne's 10-hour surgery which was followed by a two-week stay at St. Joseph's.

"Every patient and every cancer is unique," says Dr. Gagliano. "We take everything into consideration, from cultural background to family dynamics, to meet the patient where they are and to support the patient the best we can."

The support Camp received at the Cancer Center helped her overcome the many challenges she has experienced since her radical surgery. After her procedure, Roxanne was told she would not be able to work because of her ostomies, however, AT Still University heard of her advocacy in the community. She now works on a part-time basis teaching fledgling physicians about the daily life of an ostomy patient. Roxanne believes that anyone with an ostomy can overcome their difficulties and live a full life.

Living with Permanent Ostomy

Pelvic exenteration, the radical procedure used to remove Roxanne Camp's cancer, left her with permanent urostomy and colostomy bags, external pouches that collect fecal matter and urine due to the removal of organs that the body normally uses to eliminate waste.

Many people with ostomy bags tell no one as though it were a dark secret. Roxanne will have none of that.

"A lot of people will call me and I will visit them at the hospital if they've recently had an ostomy," says Roxanne. "I try to encourage people not to be embarrassed. The more you talk about it, the more you can accept it. If you don't talk about it, you'll just be really lonely."

With her gentle smile and her clear voice, Roxanne now works with the United Ostomy Associations of America (UOAA), an association of affiliated, non-profit, support groups dedicated to improving quality of life for people who have ostomies.

"This is a life-changing experience, but it's only what you make of it and that's why I'm trying to help people with ostomies," says Roxanne.

“I had the best team supporting me. They were honest; they didn’t hold anything back. But, at the same time, they treated me like a person – not just another patient. They saved my life.”

