

New Program Addresses Unique Needs

Mia Ramirez found the marble-size lump in her breast herself. She had no history of cancer in her immediate family, so when she received a diagnosis in December 2016—HER 2-positive, encapsulated stage 1 breast cancer—she was shocked.

Mia was 38 years old. She had a career in sales, a husband, two children and, suddenly, a major decision to make before she could even begin treatment: should she freeze and store some of her eggs in case therapy damaged them and she one day wanted more children?

“I hadn’t even thought about my fertility until that first appointment,” says Mia, now 39. “I wasn’t sure of anything. I couldn’t process what was happening.”

A breast cancer diagnosis is devastating at any age, but for women under the age of 42 it presents a unique set of challenges. The cancers tend to be more aggressive in this age group and the women face a higher risk of depression, sexual side effects, and menopausal symptoms.

To meet the needs of this growing population, the Lifespan Cancer Institute is building a Young Women’s Breast Cancer Program (YWBCP) aimed at providing patients with support, education, and research.

“Breast cancer in young women can have profound implications for both fertility and parenthood,” explains oncologist Mary Lopresti, DO, creator and director of the program. “Our goal is to expand support for patients, as well as provide additional education about issues that affect them, evaluating the outcomes of any interventions.”



Mia with her son

Idalina Colburn, a nurse navigator for breast and gynecological cancers at The Miriam Hospital, works closely with young breast cancer patients and sees the special needs of this group on a daily basis. As a navigator, Idalina supports patients from diagnosis through survivorship.

“Once the providers walk out of the room, I’m the person who walks in and helps the patient understand and cope with what they’ve just heard and are feeling. The navigator role is especially important within the YWBCP. There are so many things, like sexuality and depression, that young women experience,” says Idalina. “It’s a lot for them to handle.”



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Mia today

From scheduling appointments and coordinating with insurance companies, to sitting occasionally with a toddler so her mother can get her chemotherapy, the navigator makes sure nothing falls through the cracks as she and her patients navigate the cancer journey together.

For some young women, one barrier to beginning treatment is their desire to preserve their fertility. Because both chemotherapy and radiation can damage a woman's eggs, decisions need to be made within the first month of diagnosis—before treatment starts.

"It's important to immediately refer patients to fertility specialists so that they can begin the process of storing

eggs if they decide to," says Idalina. With the start of YWBCP, the goal is to make this a seamless process.

Mia and her husband, David, hadn't given much thought to expanding their family before her diagnosis. Ultimately, the Cranston couple decided not to freeze Mia's eggs because a pregnancy following her type of cancer might increase the chance of reoccurrence.

"That was very difficult," says Mia. "Not freezing eggs made the decision not to have more children official and out of my hands. I wish the Young Women's Breast Cancer Program was in existence when I had to make that decision. It would have been helpful to be able to talk to other women about the decision."

Mia, now in remission and "feeling great," was fortunate to have family close by to care for her children while she went through treatment for two breast tumors—a lumpectomy, four rounds of chemotherapy, and 33 doses of radiation. She leaned on Idalina as well as a therapist for support. "Idalina was my go-to person; if I ever needed anything, she is who I called at The Miriam."

Dr. Lopresti and Idalina hope the YWBCP will soon have an arrangement with the Jewish Community Center to offer drop-in child care for treatment and supportive services, like yoga classes. They are also working to make cold caps available for patients. These caps are worn during chemotherapy to help prevent or reduce hair loss.

"For a lot of women, their identity centers around taking care of their family, but a breast cancer diagnosis can really change family dynamics," says Idalina. "From having to explain to young children why mommy is bald, to not having the energy to do things with their family; we hope the program provides a higher level of support and guidance to see them through their treatment."

Complementary Therapies Soothe Body, Lift Spirit

Ron Skinner, age 77, has been practicing relaxation techniques for years. A former monk, Ron has pancreatic cancer, and when he learned that the Lifespan Cancer Institute at The Miriam Hospital offered acupuncture, he jumped at the opportunity.

"I have a lot of experience with meditation and mindfulness, but acupuncture takes me to a deeper level of relaxation," says Ron. "I get an almost mysterious feeling of well-being, and that's very important to me."

In addition to comprehensive medical care, The Leonard and Adele R. Decof Family Comprehensive Cancer Center at The Miriam, which is part of the Lifespan Cancer Institute, offers a host of complementary therapies to help patients cope with the physical and emotional tolls of having cancer. Reiki, hand massage, acupuncture, and massage touch therapy are available free of charge, thanks to generous donors who understand the enormous benefits these therapies provide. Most are not covered by insurance.

"Philanthropic support allows us to provide an extra dimension of care during the cancer journey," says Laura Butterfield, Director of Outpatient Cancer Services at The Miriam. "And offering these additional services at no cost means there's no added financial burden during an already challenging time."

Acupuncture can be effective at addressing the symptoms of pain, neuropathy, nausea, poor sleep,



Acupuncture

fatigue, and anxiety. "Patients may be hesitant about the needles, but I explain that they are as thin as a strand of hair," says Chris Carlow, doctor of acupuncture. "And when they have their first treatment—I love to see the smile on their faces. They're surprised at how they feel. If they're running low on energy, acupuncture can be stimulating and uplifting. If they have chronic pain, they feel relief."

For Ron, acupuncture is helping him live in the moment as he copes with a diagnosis that "came out of the blue," he says. He plans to take advantage of the other complementary therapies offered at the LCI at The Miriam.

"My experience at The Miriam Hospital has been first rate—first rate plus! Their whole program is incredible. Everyone works together seamlessly. They just do it right," concludes Ron.

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New Cardiac Rehabilitation Program Opens in East Greenwich

Thanks to a very generous grant from The Champlin Foundation to The Miriam Hospital, the Lifespan Cardiovascular Institute now offers the innovative Dean Ornish Intensive Cardiac Rehab Program at its newly renovated and equipped satellite location on South County Trail in East Greenwich.

“We’re excited to be the first health care system in New England to offer this nationally renowned cardiac rehab program, which has proved so effective in reversing the progression of heart disease,” said Wen-Chih “Hank” Wu, MD, medical director of cardiac rehabilitation at The Miriam Hospital.

Traditional cardiac rehabilitation programs typically provide 36 hours of training, primarily focused on exercise, with modest amounts of education on lifestyle factors that can improve health.



New cardiac rehab in East Greenwich

The Dean Ornish Cardiac Intensive Rehabilitation Program provides a total of 72 hours of rehabilitation and focuses on nutrition, activity, stress management, and emotional support to improve heart health. Classes meet twice weekly for nine weeks, with four hours in each session. To learn more, visit lifespan.org/cardiac-rehab.

Wild Rice and Quinoa Waldorf Salad Recipe



Serves: 6

Serving size: 1 cup

Ingredients:

For Grains:

- 1/2 cup wild rice
- 1/2 cup white quinoa rinsed well
- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt, divided

For Dressing:

- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

- 1 1/2 teaspoons pure maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon whole grain mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

For Salad:

- 2 cups apple, cored and thinly sliced
- 2/3 cup celery diced
- 1/4 cup currants
- 1/4 cup scallions (green onions) thinly sliced
- 2 cups baby spinach leaves or baby kale or arugula

Directions:

1. In a heavy-bottomed, 1 1/2-quart saucepan, cook wild rice according to package directions, adding 1/4 teaspoon of the salt.
2. In a separate heavy-bottomed, 1 1/2-quart saucepan, cook quinoa according to package directions, adding the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together apple cider vinegar, lemon juice, maple syrup, mustard, salt, and pepper. Set aside.
4. When wild rice and quinoa are cooked, combine the grains in a large bowl. Spread the grains out along the sides of the bowl and let cool to room temperature. (The grains will cool faster when spread out in a thin layer on the sides of the bowl, rather than heaped in a central pile.)
5. When grains are cool, add apples, celery, currants, green onions, and spinach. Add dressing and toss to coat.



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