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OCTOBER | NOVEMBER 2015

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# Greater Than Cancer: A Multidisciplinary Approach

BY DR. PATRICK HSU

**I**T'S ALL TOO EASY FOR PEOPLE TO CONFINE CANCER AS A SINGULAR, personal struggle. But its treatment is far from a one-man or one-woman mission, as the case may be. This is especially true for breast cancer patients, who must make numerous decisions regarding therapies to undergo, medicines to use, doctors to consult with, and a whole other world of personal issues with which to contend.

Over the years, breast cancer and cancer recovery has become bigger than the individual directly afflicted with it. This change has been all for the better, both for the patient's and the medical field's sakes. Thanks to a more flexible perspective on the definition of cancer treatment, patients have more means toward long-term wellness at their disposal, and physicians are immersed in a more collaborative environment conducive to advances, big and small, in healing.

The multidisciplinary approach usually kicks off with staging the cancer, determining its so-called "personality," and customizing a plan that

accommodates a patient's personal preferences. After these have been determined, the next steps involve surgery, therapy or a combination of the two.

What kind of surgery does a breast cancer patient usually undergo? There are two main options: lumpectomy and mastectomy. The first, also called breast-conserving surgery, allows for the removal of only the tumor and a small amount of surrounding tissue. The other entails the removal of all breast tissue, cancer-infected and otherwise.

Additional surgeries include lymph node removal and breast reconstruction. As key components of the immune



system, lymph nodes can aid in determining cancer stage and if cancer has spread outside the breast into other parts of the body.

Although breast reconstruction serves a seemingly superficial purpose, it helps patients feel and look more like their old, whole selves after a mastectomy or a particularly substantial lumpectomy. Rebuilding the

breast or breasts can ease anxieties about a patient's appearance caused by cancer-related surgeries. That psychological advantage alone makes reconstruction an increasingly natural choice for a breast cancer patient after a mastectomy.

Aside from surgical treatment, those with breast cancer have various types of



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