

Patient: Debbie Correa

Diagnosis: Brain Cancer

Referred to: Sobrato Cancer Center at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center

Care Team: Dr. Nam Cho, MD, PhD
Medical Director,
Sobrato Cancer Center,
Radiation Oncologist

Dr. Amanpreet Buttar, MD
Hematologist &
Oncologist

Ling Garlow, RN
Oncology Nurse Navigator



Always There for Brain Cancer Patients

When people find out they have cancer, they can feel upset and scared. They worry about treatments and how they will handle it. At Santa Clara Valley Medical Center's (SCVMC) Sobrato Cancer Center, everyone on the care team makes sure that patients feel supported and get the help they need.

Debbie Correa knows just how helpful the cancer care team can be. She was a 35 years old single mother of four when she was taken to the hospital after having a seizure. Medical tests showed that Debbie was very healthy but she had brain cancer. It was decided that Debbie would not have surgery and instead be treated with chemotherapy and radiation.

One of the first care team members Debbie met was Ling Garlow, a nurse navigator. Ling let Debbie know she was there for her. As a nurse navigator, Ling helps Debbie schedule appointments and assists with health insurance and other financial issues. She will also determine if a patient needs to see a psychologist, makes sure they are eating well, and that they are in a healthy living situation.

“We don't just prescribe medications and send patients home,” says Dr. Amanpreet Buttar, who led Debbie's care team. “We talk with our patients even before they come here. As a team, we reassure them, explain their treatments, and schedule appointments within two weeks so they don't have a long wait. As a team, we all know each other and stay in close communication about our patients' treatment plan.”

“We are advocates for the patient,” says Ling Garlow. “I had Debbie's friends and family come in and talk with me so I could make sure they understood what to expect. I provide information about the treatment schedule, talked about side effects, the importance of taking medications on time, and keeping chemotherapy and other medical appointments.”

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During Debbie’s treatment, challenges came up, but none that the team could not handle.

When a medicine stopped being made that Debbie was taking, Ling called pharmacies in the area until she finally found one that had the drug. She was able to get it and keep Debbie’s treatment on track.

Another challenge was making sure that Debbie had the care she needed at home. This included having someone who could help with her children who were ages 17, 13, 9, and 5 years old at the time she was going through treatment.

“It’s difficult to come to the hospital, receive chemo treatment, and then go home and take care of four children,” says Dr. Buttar. “We got family and friends to help, as well as having Debbie’s mother stay with her.”

The team never let Debbie down. They went the extra mile, helping out with Debbie’s children by enrolling them in a week-long summer camp where they can get away, have fun and forget about cancer.

When Debbie faced personal struggles during treatment she stayed positive. She did not hide anything from her family and even introduced them to the care team that was so special to her.

“My littlest one was scared that I wasn’t going to come home,” says Debbie. “So, I brought all my children to appointments so they could hear from the doctors.”

Today, things are looking good for Debbie. Her tumor has shrunk. She has finished her last cycle of chemo. In the coming months she will be regularly seen in the Sobrato Cancer Center to make sure she continues to do well.

Even with everything Debbie has been through, she has always kept a smile on her face. “I’ve never been down, never been negative. All the staff helped me. They are awesome. I never had a bad experience.”

Learn more about our Sobrato Cancer Center programs, call 408.793.2500.

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