

POSITIVE RESULTS DELIVERED

As Ericka Johnson's excitement about the impending birth of her baby girl grew, so did her nagging cough.

About two weeks from her delivery date, the North Liberty resident went to MercyCare North Liberty Urgent Care for some relief from her cough. But a chest X-ray was out of the question due to her

pregnancy and she was told it could be a respiratory infection. As time went by, however, the cough got worse and her blood pressure began climbing at each prenatal visit.

"It was a fierce cough, but otherwise I felt fine. I thought maybe the baby was just sitting weird," she says.

Ericka began sleeping propped up on four or five pillows to ease the coughing. She made a return visit to the clinic and received a prescription for medication, along with instructions to come back in five days if the cough hadn't improved.

Before those five days expired, she delivered a healthy baby girl on Aug. 16. Due to her high blood pressure, she had to stay flat on her back during the delivery and that made it a struggle to breathe. She remembers the doctor saying she "coughed the baby out."

After being released from the hospital, Ericka was still plagued by the persistent cough. She went to MercyCare North Liberty, convinced she had pneumonia. A chest X-ray was taken, revealing a large, 11-cm mass in the area behind her breast bone. Ericka was told to go straight to the hospital, so she called her husband and sister and headed for Mercy Medical Center.

Blood work and a CT scan revealed frightening results for the 37-year-old mother of two and her family: Non-Hodgkin's, large B-cell lymphoma – CANCER.

The pressure of the tumor on her windpipe and blood vessels was literally choking her and causing her to cough.

Immediately, she was admitted to Mercy for inpatient chemotherapy. Oncologic surgeon Vincent Reid, MD, Medical Director of Mercy's Hall-Perrine Cancer Center, removed a lymph

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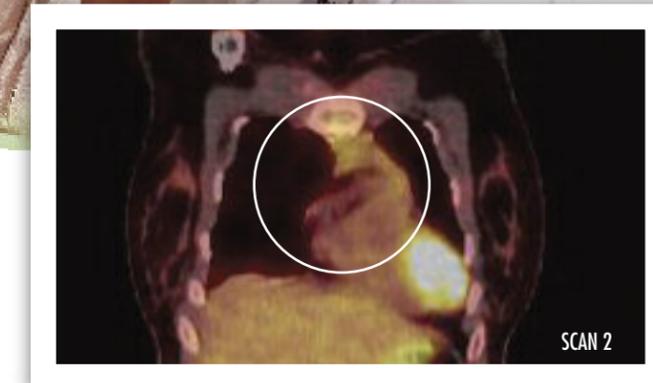
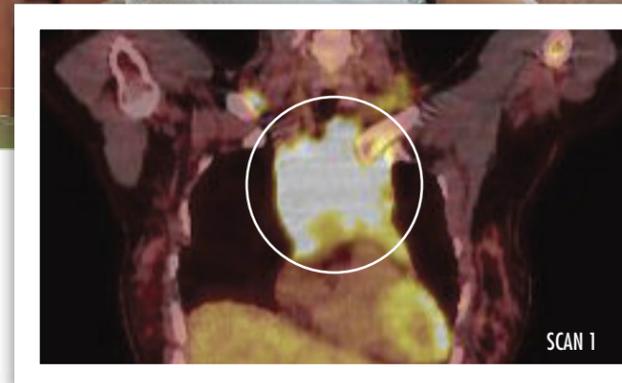
Ericka Johnson, Hall-Perrine Cancer Center patient

node and medical oncologist Samuel Wood, MD, performed a bone marrow biopsy.

They found cancer in her lymph nodes around her collarbone and her bone marrow, and she was diagnosed with stage 4 lymphoma. Dr. Wood told her she had a fast-growing type of cancer and had probably only had the tumor for four to six months.

"Our world turned upside down," remembers Ericka. "I have no family history of cancer. I've never smoked and my husband (Phil) doesn't smoke. I exercise and watch what I eat."

She was sad that having chemotherapy meant she had to stop breastfeeding their newborn daughter, Ellingtyn. And, she was concerned about whether she'd have the energy to keep up with their two-year-old son, Maddux.



Medical oncologist Samuel Wood, MD, was excited when PET-CT scans showed amazing results after just two sessions of chemotherapy to treat Ericka Johnson's stage 4 lymphoma.

support. Ericka has received a lot of babysitting help while she goes for chemotherapy treatments from a family that lost their mother to cancer and wanted to help in her memory.

It wasn't exactly how Ericka had planned to spend her maternity leave from her position as a program director for Mount Vernon Schools. Her treatment regimen consists of a total of six rounds of chemo every three weeks. For the first two weeks after treatment, Ericka says she feels "lousy. But after that I feel like the old Ericka."

The good news is that the chemotherapy is working! Dr. Wood reported excellent results after just two treatments. Ericka says, "I know it's helping, because I can breathe better and I only use one pillow at night now."

"The outlook is good but I don't know what my outcome will be," she says. She's staying positive and is focused on completing her treatments – just in time to enjoy the Christmas holidays with her family. The best gift Ericka could receive is good news about her health.

To learn more about Mercy's cancer services visit
www.Hall-PerrineCancerCenter.org