

A^{the}-TEAM approach TO CANCER CARE

Fighting breast cancer alone is one fear patients at Mercy Women's Center will never have to face. No one knows that better than Jerrie Bourgo, Cedar Rapids.



Dr. Jeff Nielsen
Surgical Specialist with Physicians'
Clinic of Iowa

Jerrie's mother and maternal grandmother had breast cancer. Both were long-term survivors. But that history kept Jerrie, 64, diligent about annual mammograms. She welcomed having Mercy Women's Center as a great resource, participating for eight years in Mercy's Star Study for high-risk breast cancer patients.

In April, Jerrie's annual check-up led to a second mammogram and biopsy. They confirmed her worst fears: a tiny, malignant tumor on the underside of her right breast, near the chest wall. It was so small she could never have found it in a self-examination. Katie Feldman, a breast health specialist with the Women's Center, called Jerrie with the news.

"It was a difficult phone call," Jerrie recalls. "I had a feeling it would be cancer. My gut instinct told me something wasn't right. All of a sudden you're a different person – somebody with cancer. For weeks it was all I thought of 24 hours a day."

Fear is the common denominator for those diagnosed with cancer. But what happens from there is what's critical to a patient's experience – and survival.

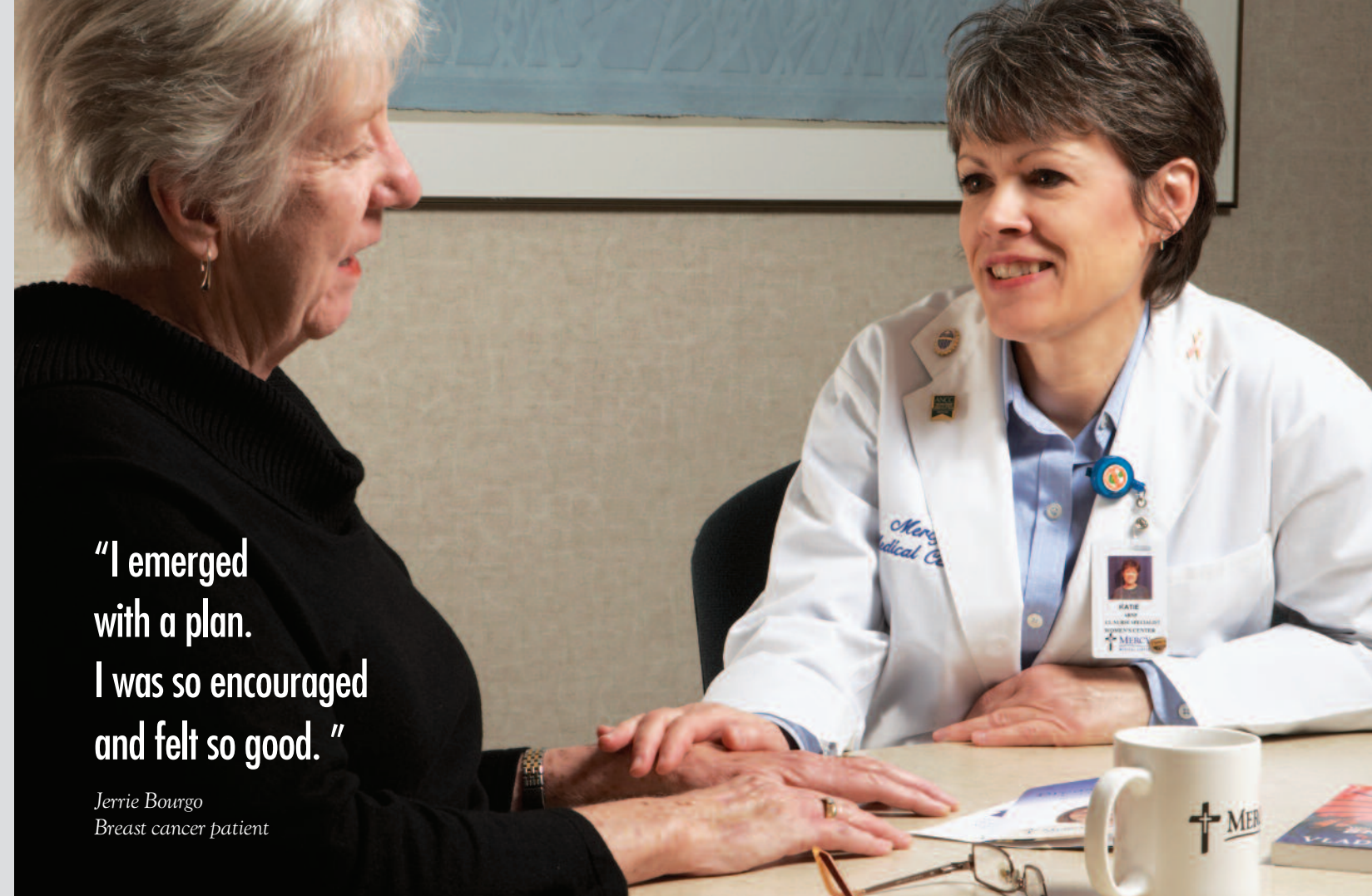
Mercy Regional Cancer Center and Mercy Women's Center transformed the concept of breast cancer care with the Multidisciplinary Breast Cancer Clinic. A team of cancer specialists – surgeons, radiation oncologists and medical

oncologists – work together to provide women newly-diagnosed with breast cancer evidence-based care that is seamless, convenient, personalized and supportive. And that coordinated approach shortens the time from diagnosis to treatment and helps ease anxiety, confusion and fear.

"Katie talked to me about the clinic and offered reference materials for me right away," Jerrie notes. "She had already begun to arrange for my care; an appointment was set up the next day. The breast cancer clinic empowers you to start working with and dealing with the cancer immediately – to focus on treatment and recovery. You start your recovery then."

The clinic relies on one point of contact – the breast health specialist – who acts as a liaison between the patient and the health care team. It also provides one session for individual appointments with a surgeon, radiation oncologist and medical oncologist; patients leave with a treatment plan for consideration. Jerrie met with the breast cancer clinic team one week after her biopsy.

"This provides continuity to the information the patient is being told, offering her a chance to clarify questions as she hears the treatment plan suggested for her," explains Rebecca Jacobs, Senior Director of Women's and Children's Services.



"I emerged with a plan. I was so encouraged and felt so good."

Jerrie Bourgo
Breast cancer patient

Dr. Jeff Nielsen, a surgical specialist with Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, notes that this sort of clinic is unique to Cedar Rapids, but the idea is gaining ground nationally.

"It's been working really well here. The patients seem to really appreciate getting all their appointments done in one stop," Dr. Nielsen adds. "I tell all our patients, the most important thing for you is to make sure you understand and have all your questions answered, as much as possible, before making a decision."

"I emerged with a plan," Jerrie remembers. "I was so encouraged and felt so good. My plan was to get a lumpectomy, followed by radiation and hormone therapy. It was a small tumor. They

all had a lot of hope that lymph nodes weren't involved."

Her surgery in May went well. Starting in June, she completed 6½ weeks of daily radiation (33 treatments) and in late July, she began hormone treatment. She reports no problems so far.

Ironically, she felt sad to leave the friends she made during radiation treatment.

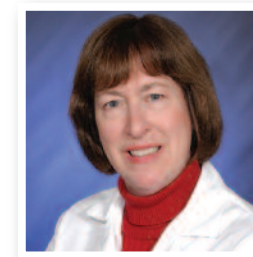
"It was sort of a wrenching day, that last one. You get so attached to the people there," she explains. "The support is just incredible."

Through it all, Jerrie says, "The Women's Center focuses on you and your emotional and physical comfort. The breast cancer clinic is such a humane practice of medicine. The whole experience has been empowering."

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Jerrie Bourgo
Breast cancer patient

Katie Feldman (above), a breast health specialist with Mercy Women's Center, acts as the liaison between breast cancer patient Jerrie Bourgo (left) and a team of surgeons, radiation oncologists and medical oncologists participating in Mercy's Multidisciplinary Breast Cancer Clinic.



Dr. Janet Merfeld
Medical Director
Hall Radiation Center