

A Survivor's Second Act

Early detection was critical for breast cancer patient Leah Morasse



Leah Morasse is an energetic, rosy-cheeked woman with a crown of soft, blonde curls. When accepting a compliment about her appearance, she is quick to respond with, “My hair is growing back.”

The 43-year-old Andover resident’s voice is calm as she recounts the trials she went through over the last 18 months. Diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2016, she had surgery two months later, which was followed by chemotherapy beginning in October, and then radiation treatments from February through April 2017. Today, she is focused on her recovery and feeling better every day.

Importance of early detection. Leah says the 3-D mammography she received at Lawrence General’s Women’s Health Imaging at Andover Medical Center saved her life, because the type of breast cancer she had is difficult to treat and was found at a very early stage. “I am living proof that

women should always remember to get their routine breast screenings,” she says. “Early detection is critical.”

The aggressive treatment that followed her screening consumed her life for a year and a half. Those months were tough on her family. While she was well cared for, she felt there were few resources for her two young children and husband. After treatment concluded, Leah says she felt isolated, too. She felt left on her own to deal with many lingering questions and uncertainties once her treatment was over.

A resource for others. “There are resources out there for families and cancer survivors, but they are scattered around the area. My kids and my husband need support, and so do I. [We need] safe places to talk with people who understand what we’ve been through,” Leah observes. “We’ve connected with Andover Youth Services, which has been



After beating breast cancer, Leah Morasse, pictured here with her daughter, Liliana, and son, Trevor, is now focused on helping other cancer survivors in the Merrimack Valley.

Experts in Early Detection

When it comes to the early detection of breast, lung, and colon cancer, Lawrence General is counted among the best hospitals in the country. According to the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons, Lawrence General exceeds the national average for catching these cancers in the earliest stages, greatly improving the chances for successful treatment.

“The key to our success is patient education, outreach into the community, and the availability of the most current diagnostic techniques,” says oncologist Pedro Sanz-Altamira, MD, from Dana-Farber Community Cancer Care, who also serves as medical director of the Lawrence General cancer program. “Lawrence General is excelling in all of these areas.”

Primary care physicians in the region play a particularly important role providing education to patients about cancer prevention and emphasizing the importance of regular screenings, says Dr. Sanz-Altamira. Lawrence General also hosts regular community events around the Merrimack Valley that provide both education and screening opportunities for the general public.

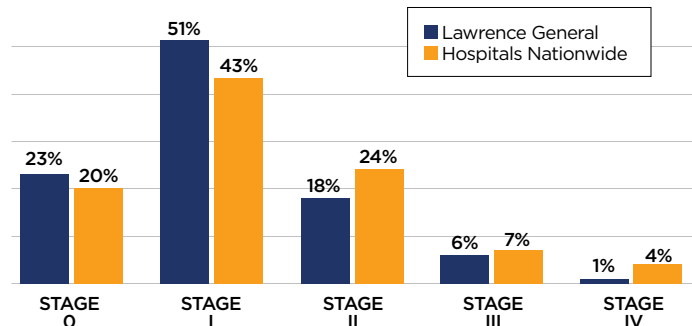
Lawrence General’s commitment to using 3-D tomosynthesis digital mammography, the most advanced breast imaging technology available for routine screening, at all of its locations plays an important role in early detection of breast cancer. And the use of low-dose spiral CT scanning technology for lung cancer screening helps detect lung cancer early as well.

EXPERTISE CLOSE TO HOME

To learn more about Lawrence General’s cancer program, visit lawrencegeneral.org/services-and-centers/cancer-care.

LAWRENCE GENERAL CATCHES BREAST CANCER EARLY

The percentage of patients diagnosed at different stages of breast cancer at Lawrence General compared to hospitals nationwide*



*This data is courtesy of the National Cancer Database, which is jointly sponsored by the American College of Surgeons and the American Cancer Society. The most recent comparative hospital data is for 2015, but Lawrence General’s breast cancer early detection rates are as good or better for 2016 and 2017.

great—offering a family fun night for cancer survivors and their families. But there are so many questions about nutrition, physical activity, social and emotional needs, among other things. Cancer is draining physically, emotionally, and financially, too. I am on a mission to identify affordable resources that can help families of our region live through the experience together.”

FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY

If you are interested in joining Leah Morasse in her effort to build resources for cancer survivors in the Merrimack Valley, visit her Facebook page, Friends Along the Way, at [facebook.com/communityfamilycancersupport](https://www.facebook.com/communityfamilycancersupport).