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Doctor as Patient: Jefferson Trauma Team Cares for Medical Oncologist Edith Mitchell at Paoli Hospital

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Surgical Solutions

Doctor as Patient: Jefferson Trauma Team Cares for Medical Oncologist Edith Mitchell at Paoli Hospital

Edith Mitchell, MD, FACS, knows a lot about emergency medical care. But she had no experience as a patient in an emergency department – until she was critically injured in December 2010.

From 1987 until 2004, Dr. Mitchell, a medical oncologist who has practiced at Jefferson since 1997, held increasingly responsible roles supervising emergency care as part of the National Guard. By the end of her military career, Dr. Mitchell was overseeing 55 of 84 National Guard medical units. She was responsible for establishing standard operating procedures for emergency care and emergency transportation – and ensuring that all military physicians, nurses and related personnel were properly trained on those procedures.

Not surprisingly, when she found herself critically injured in an automobile accident, Dr. Mitchell says she quickly began assessing her injuries and her pain.

“I heard somebody outside my room say, ‘I would know that voice anywhere – that’s Edith Mitchell!’”

“My training and experience helped me,” she says. “I immediately turned off my car to make sure there was no gasoline flowing, and I put the car in park in case it shifted. I also began assessing myself and my own injuries so I could tell people what was hurt.” And, Dr. Mitchell admits, she was gearing up to insist that she be transferred to Jefferson as soon as her condition was stable.

As it turned out, she was able to receive top-notch care in the suburbs – thanks to



Drs. Murray Cohen and Edith Mitchell reunite in front of the Jefferson Kimmel Cancer Center. In December 2010, the longtime colleagues crossed paths unexpectedly in the Level II Trauma Center at Paoli Hospital following a serious car accident.

Paoli Hospital’s Level II Trauma Center, which had earned accreditation just two months prior to Dr. Mitchell’s accident.

As the Paoli nurses were helping Dr. Mitchell put on a gown, she says, “I heard somebody outside my room say, ‘I would know that voice anywhere – that’s Edith Mitchell!’”

A physician entered the room wearing a surgical mask, which Dr. Mitchell swears looked not like a mask but a halo. She recognized this “angel” as Murray J. Cohen, MD, FACS. Dr. Cohen is not only Director of Jefferson’s Division of Acute Care Surgery, but he is also Dr. Mitchell’s longtime colleague and friend.

Dr. Mitchell laughs as she recalls her initial exchange with Dr. Cohen:

“I said, ‘Murray, what are you doing in an emergency room at Paoli Hospital?!’ and he said, ‘I was going to ask you the same thing, but I can see you’re hurt!’”

That’s when Dr. Mitchell learned of – and began to benefit from – Paoli’s recent trauma accreditation. This joint effort between the Division of Acute Care Surgery at Jefferson and Paoli Hospital is the only accredited trauma center in Chester County (see sidebar).

“The trauma service at Paoli was able to take care of everything,” Dr. Mitchell concludes. “They performed an immediate assessment of my injuries and then delivered specifically targeted care – almost instantaneously.”

Surgeon Speaks



Kris Kaulback, MD, FACS

Assistant Professor,
Division of Acute Care Surgery at Jefferson
Medical Director, Trauma Center at Paoli Hospital

Following a major, multisystem trauma, being seen by a trauma center within 60 minutes can mean the difference between life and death. Thanks to Paoli Hospital’s accredited Level II trauma center, which opened on October 1, 2010, more people in Chester County are receiving critical care within the “golden hour.”

As Kris Kaulback, MD, FACS, explains, Paoli earned accreditation by addressing the extensive standards outlined by the Pennsylvania State Trauma Foundation (PSTF). Accreditation reflects the resources available at Paoli around the clock – including access to specially trained physicians, surgeons and nurses, as well as tools and technologies essential for rapid diagnosis and treatment.

“Paoli is the only accredited trauma center in Chester County, giving residents of the county access to critical care faster and closer to home,” says Dr. Kaulback, a longtime member of Jefferson’s surgical faculty.

Indeed, according to the PSTF, prior to October 2010, only 37 percent of Chester County patients made it to any trauma center within the “golden hour.” Thanks to Paoli’s trauma center, that number now exceeds 80 percent – with Chester County trauma patients now receiving critical care, on average, 15 to 20 minutes faster than before. And, as Dr. Kaulback notes, “The survival rate for patients with injury severity scores over 16 is now 93 percent, compared to 84 percent before Paoli’s trauma center opened.”

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