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Patients Benefit from Multi-Disciplinary Approach of Jefferson Gastroesophageal Center

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Gastroesophageal Center Approach of Jefferson
underwent additional testing, which map out his treatment plan. He quickly multi-disciplinary team was prepared to
Within days, Harbold was being seen in my bed reading a book when my esophagus meets the stomach about 12
he says, 'It was adenocarcinoma of the lying in my bed reading a book when my
sneezing and coughing. When he found didn’t seem like an emergency. Then,
his family doctor. A blood test bouts of hiccups lasting 10 to 15 minutes
time I had a symptom, they had an extreme fatigue and numerous side effects but lauds Jefferson’s team. (‘Every
time I had a symptom, they had an answer,’ he says.) Allowing six to eight weeks to recover from the second round of chemo and radiation therapy. Harbold was scheduled for an esophagectomy in April 2014 with Dr. Rosato and Nathaniel R. Evans, MD, FACS, FCCP.
At the end of those six weeks, a scan showed that the chemo had shrunk the tumor, and Harbold began a second, even more intense, round of chemotherapy plus radiation therapy. He recalls the extreme fatigue and numerous side effects that lauds Jefferson’s team. (‘Every
time I had a symptom, they had an answer,’ he says.) Allowing six to eight weeks to recover from the second round of chemo and radiation therapy. Harbold was scheduled for an esophagectomy in April 2014 with Dr. Rosato and Nathaniel R. Evans, MD, FACS, FCCP.

"I thank God every day for the people at Jefferson!"

"An esophagectomy is a major procedure," explains Dr. Rosato. "Dr. Evans and I were able to perform a minimally invasive esophagectomy to remove the tumor with a segment of esophagus and stomach as well as surrounding lymph nodes. This was all performed thoracoscopically and laparoscopically – by inserting scopes and instruments through small incisions into the chest and abdomen – without the need for any significant incisions."

"The Jefferson Gastroesophageal Center is fortunate to have a trio of specialized nurses to help patients prepare for the esophagectomy procedure, coordinate all of the required tests and follow-up, and provide support through any chemotherapy/radiation and the recovery process.
During their hospital stay, patients and families lean on inpatient nurse practitioner Kate Thistle, CRNP. Kate’s support during the initial postop days and explanations prior to discharge are critical to start a smooth recovery. Often the most challenging rehabilitation comes in the days and weeks following discharge.
Nurse practitioner Lori Pellegrino, MSN, CRNP, has spent the last seven years caring for esophagectomy patients in the practice of general surgeon Ernest L. Rosado, MD, FACS. She is familiar with the lengthy and challenging recovery – and is passionate about helping esophagectomy patients and their caregivers navigate the process. Lori notes that the recovery brings significant changes to quality of life. For many patients, one of the most challenging aspects is nutrition. The transition from five to seven days of a feeding tube to eating with a "new," smaller stomach can take many weeks and introduce a lot of frustration.

"The collaboration between general and thoracic surgeons allows us to tailor surgical therapy to the specific needs of each patient," Dr. Evans notes. "The vast majority of our patients have minimally invasive surgery like Mr. Harbold. Smaller incisions mean less pain, so patients can get out of bed and get on the road to recovery sooner."

Harbold spent almost two weeks recovering in the hospital before returning home to continue the process. "After surgery is a pretty difficult time," he recalls. "Your body has to learn how to eat all over again, and just walking a few yards is a major event." He relied on Dr. Rosato and nurse practitioner Lori Pellegrino, MSN, CRNP, for answers to all of the many challenges he encountered along the way (see "On the Job" above).
He also leaned heavily on his faith and his family, including his children and his ex-wife, all of whom have helped in providing his care.

"Aperture is often emotional," she says. "After this surgery, patients have to learn that there’s only so much room down there to hold food.” To help, Lori has developed a protocol that outlines clear recommendations for what to eat, when and in what quantities. She also spends a great deal of time providing one-to-one support on the phone.
Sung Whang, MSN, CRNP, CTTS, is Lori’s counterpart in the practice of thoracic surgeon Nathaniel Evans, MD, FACS. In response to patient requests, Sung recently formed the Jefferson Esophagectomy Survivorship and Support Group that meets in person and online. This newly formed group offers patients and caregivers a forum to share experiences, gather new information and reunite with their Jefferson physicians and surgeons.
"This surgery is a game-changer," says Sung. "We try to address all the issues – diet and nutrition, speech and swallow therapy, help obtaining the necessary tube feeds and medical equipment and providing tools to help caregivers, who are often exhausted. We’re there through every step of the way."
Patients and family members can join the online support group at facebook.com/groups/EsophagectomyJeff

The physical part is 50 percent – take the medication, take care of yourself, don’t push yourself," he says. "But I think the biggest advice I would give to another patient is to prepare yourself emotionally and spiritually. Your faith either gets deeper or you find faith pretty quickly. You’re facing a very long recovery."

These days, Harbold continues to be monitored by his team at Jefferson, but he is back to teaching and coaching. He’s exercising several times a week, and he’s even volunteering at the Jefferson Infusion Center – doing his best to give others hope and encouragement. He’s also active in a number of in-person and telephone–based support groups, including the one recently launched by the Gastroesophageal Center.
"I can’t fight this thing alone, and the people who have helped me are just marvelous," he says. "I thank God every day for the people at Jefferson!"

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