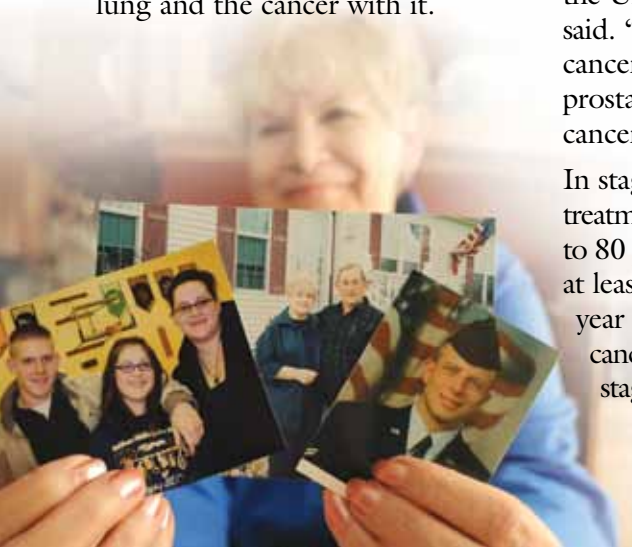
THE VALUE OF *early detection*

Marilynn Carter

As Marilynn Carter can attest, finding cancer early and adopting a healthy lifestyle is the key to surviving. The 73-year-old Ravenna resident has beaten cancer three times, first breast, then lung and then bladder. Carter knows she's lucky — especially when it comes to lung cancer — and her 10-year survival stands out in light of lung cancer statistics released by the Robinson Memorial Hospital Cancer Committee this summer.

"All three detections were early," Carter said. "And I've been doing all the screenings yearly and having my check-ups."

Her encounter with lung cancer was in July 2000 when she went to Robinson Med Center One to be treated for what she thought was bronchitis. After suspecting pneumonia and ordering X-rays, her doctor and the radiologist found a mass in her left lung that turned out to be stage I cancer. Her doctor referred her to Thoracic and Vascular Surgeon Badr Ghumrawi, MD, for surgery at Robinson Memorial Hospital. Dr. Ghumrawi removed her left lung and the cancer with it.



"It was one of my fears before surgery that I wouldn't see my three children and four grandchildren grow up," Carter said. "I also had a fear of being on oxygen all my life."

Today, Carter maintains an active lifestyle and says she's proud to attend her 13-year-old granddaughter, Mollie's, softball games and go with the family to A&W afterward. At the time of Carter's diagnosis, Mollie — the youngest grandchild — was three years old.

"She would ask me, 'Grandma, do you need a hand?' or 'Grandma, what are you thinking?'" Carter said. "She was just a doll."

Carter was treated with surgery alone, though in 2009 — an incredible fact, considering only six percent of lung cancer patients receive surgery alone.

"Cancer of the lung is the most deadly of all the malignant diseases in the United States," Dr. Ghumrawi said. "In fact, death from lung cancer exceeds breast, colon, prostate and pancreatic cancer combined."

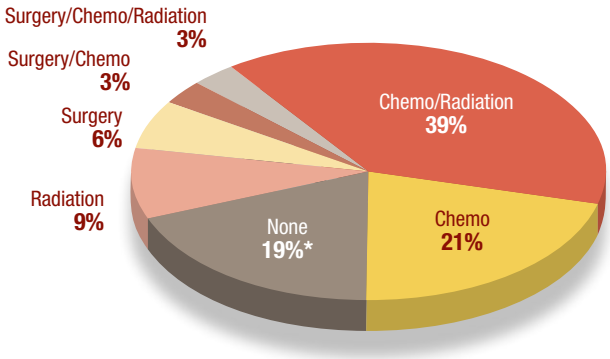
In stage I or II cancer cases, the treatment is usually surgery, with 70 to 80 percent of the patients surviving at least five years. In contrast, five-year survival for all types of lung cancer is 10 to 15 percent with stage III and IV included.

"Many times when the patient has symptoms like coughing or spitting up blood, it is too advanced, and it may have spread to other sites," Dr. Ghumrawi said.

The number one thing Dr. Ghumrawi says patients could do to lessen their risk of lung cancer, is to quit smoking or never start. His patient Marilynn Carter smoked for many years, but she said she quit as soon as she was diagnosed. She also said that walking and keeping a sense of humor may have helped.

"The support of my husband, Clyde, along with family, friends and faith got me through it," she said.

Robinson Memorial Hospital 2009 Lung Cancer Cases



* These patients either elected not to have treatment or were too sick to tolerate treatment.

The treatment chart above shows the combination of lung cancer treatments that are typical at Robinson Memorial Hospital in any given year. In 2009, Robinson Memorial Hospital saw 67 cases of lung cancer — 42 men and 25 women. Most troubling is that 18 of the cases were already stage III and 30 were in stage IV. A five-year survival for any stage of lung cancer is only 13.7 percent.