

Breast Angiosarcoma

Rare Cancer, Unique Treatment

A few months ago, 63-year-old Erika Dougherty noticed a growth on her chest. Because of her history of breast cancer and angiosarcoma, Dougherty knew that she needed to get it checked out immediately.

A biopsy determined that Dougherty had a breast angiosarcoma, a rare form of breast cancer that grows in soft or connective tissue, which can occur up to 20 years after treatment for previous breast cancer.

“When the angiosarcoma first appears, it may be tender or painful, and is sometimes mistaken for a rash or bruise,” says Johns Hopkins surgical oncologist Mehran Habibi, M.D. “That’s why it is important to see your primary care physician or oncologist, especially if you have a history of breast cancer.”

Dr. Habibi and Johns Hopkins plastic surgeon Maura Reinblatt, M.D., worked together to create a treatment plan that would best suit Dougherty’s needs and wants. Angiosarcomas are removed with surgery and then radiation to ensure that the base and edges have been treated as well.

First, Dr. Habibi cut an 8-inch-wide excision to remove the angiosarcoma. Because of where it was located, he had to take all of Dougherty’s chest wall muscle, leaving a gap in her chest that had to be reconstructed by a plastic surgeon.

Once the angiosarcoma was removed, Dr. Reinblatt performed a procedure known as a latissimus dorsi myocutaneous flap in order to

Maura Reinblatt,
M.D., patient Erika
Dougherty, and
Mehran Habibi, M.D.,
discuss Erika’s
treatment options.



help preserve Dougherty’s quality of life. Dr. Reinblatt explains that using this procedure to close the wound, instead of using a skin graft, provided the extra coverage that Dougherty needed to withstand further radiation. A skin graft would have been very thin and fragile.

Now, Dougherty is recovering and feeling great. “I’m still doing the things I love—quilting and taking photographs,” she says. “Dr. Habibi and Dr. Reinblatt worked together to find the best treatment possible to return me to my normal activities. The collaboration and communication between the two of them put me completely at ease. I knew I was in the right hands.”

“We’re ‘Beauty and the Beast,’” says Dr. Habibi. “I remove the bad, cancerous parts and Dr. Reinblatt makes them beautiful once again.”

—Katie Kuehn

Johns Hopkins Cancer Surgery Second Opinion program

Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center offers a full spectrum of cancer care, including removal, reconstruction and a second opinion.

Second opinions are a normal step in the cancer management and treatment process. The Johns Hopkins Cancer Surgery Second Opinion program offers those recently diagnosed with breast, lung, GI or thyroid cancer the ability to consult with some of the leading experts in cancer surgery.

To make an appointment for a second opinion, call 410-550-HOPE (4673).

For more information about a cancer surgery second opinion, call 410-550-HOPE (4673).
For more information about reconstructive surgery, call 410-550-9845.