

Gretchen Roeth

After more than 30 years experience teaching others, it was Gretchen Roeth's turn to learn during her battle with cancer.

A retired fourth grade teacher in the Piqua schools, Roeth was diagnosed last summer with endometrial cancer after checking with doctors when "something didn't seem right" to her.

She underwent 31 radiation treatments, ending in mid-January, at UVMC Cancer Care Center.

"I was nervous. I was afraid. My blood pressure went through the ceiling," Roeth said. "All of the (Cancer Care) therapists walked me through things ... They knew I was a mess, but they were very good with it. Everybody was very patient with me."

Jean Heath, Director of the Cancer Care Center, said the center prides itself on individualized care for patients.

"We know every time somebody walks through that front door they have the fear of what is behind the door. They ask, 'What is going to happen to me?'" Heath said. "This staff knows everybody is different. It is not a cookie cutter process."

Roeth said she was encouraged to undergo treatment at UVMC by her sister in law, who received breast cancer treatment at the center a few years ago.

"I talked to her quite a bit. She was very helpful," Roeth said. "She said, 'You don't want to go someplace else. They can take care of you.' And, they did. I felt like I was The Patient. I never felt like I was a number."

After reading pamphlets provided by caregivers, talking with doctors and doing some Internet research, Roeth said she felt more comfortable, but never hesitated to ask questions. To prepare for appointments, she'd write down questions, instead of asking off the cuff.

"No question was too stupid. I never felt like I asked a question that they didn't want to answer," she said.

Heath said the center advises those looking on the Internet to visit reputable sites such as ones by the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute. "There is so much out there that it can overwhelm you, and some of it is not right," Heath said.

Among lessons Roeth learned along her cancer treatment journey was to document. She compiled a family medical history including information on events such as any cancer and age when they occurred for her and husband, Gary, plus their parents.

"I have shared it with my kids so we all know what happened to everybody, and when ... It has been very helpful," said Roeth, who works part time at the Piqua YWCA. She and Gary have two children and a granddaughter.

An awareness of one's body also is important, she said. "A doctor told me to know your body, listen to your body. If something isn't right or it bothers you, then go see somebody about it," she said.

"To me it was like other people have cancer, but that wasn't going to happen to me. Then, when it does, it was like, 'Oh, gosh, I really need to be a lot more aware.' I have learned."

Although she was scared, Roeth said she took a positive approach to her treatment.

"You learn that life is precious and you take care of things. It is a whole attitude," she said. "People can make it horrible, and it doesn't have to be horrible. There are better days ahead."

ADVICE from Gretchen Roeth

- Be comfortable with your doctor, know your doctor.
 - Know what's ahead as far as you can.
 - Bring questions to doctor and treatment appointments.
 - Take care of yourself. If you have any symptoms or signs, have them checked out.
 - Be persistent.
 - Compile a family history for your use, and your children's.
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