



Making decisions and taking control comes naturally to Victoria Taylor, a successful business owner. These traits gave her confidence during her treatment for breast cancer.

the different treatment options over coffee, Victoria pleaded to Jenny, “What should I do? Why don’t you decide?”

Victoria will never forget Jenny’s response. “She told me, ‘Vicki, this is not the time for that. This is time for you to get tough. It’s you. You have to decide.’

“It was the greatest thing anybody ever said to me,” recalls Victoria. “It made me really go within myself and decide that, yes, it is me, and I have the power to make all the right decisions for myself. I was going to start participating in my own health and my own healing from that moment on.”

Victoria took control. She put together a treatment team and asked Walter Urba, M.D., Ph.D., director of research at Providence Cancer Center, to lead it. “He exuded confidence,” she says. “It was a great support, having him.” For the next several months, she used every tool that he and others gave her to fight and win.

Victoria had a lumpectomy and simultaneous breast reconstruction surgery, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. Naturally, she hoped that her surgery had removed all of her cancer. But she saw chemotherapy as her insurance policy, just in case there were any cancer cells remaining in her body. “I welcomed the chemo,” she says. “If there’s anything there, come get it! I

Taking control

A tiny seed. Victoria Taylor was lying on her side in bed when she felt it, just under the skin of her right breast – this little seed.

“The minute I touched it, I knew,” she says. “It hadn’t been there before, and I just knew. So I took a deep breath and I called my primary physician and went in for a check. A couple of days later I got a phone call – they told me I’d been diagnosed with cancer.”

Victoria is a woman who is accustomed to being in control. She has owned and managed Mercantile, a very successful downtown boutique, for 30 years. She and her husband also are pilots – they own their own small plane – and Victoria is perfectly comfortable at the controls. This, however, was a new experience.

“Somehow, the word ‘cancer’ has this powerful meaning, more than most words in our language,” she says. “Your mind just starts reeling about your life, what you have and haven’t done, and all the things you still want to do. A little bit of your mind thinks, is this a death sentence for me? Is this my wake-up call to the end of my life?”

Victoria asked her sister, Jenny, for help. Jenny had been treated successfully for breast cancer 15 years earlier. She agreed to accompany Victoria to her doctors’ appointments. One morning, as they were mulling over all

wanted to go through it, because I wanted to give myself the best chance for life.”

Victoria credits Dr. Urba as a “great asset” in her successful treatment. Another asset, she says, was her own diet. Early on, she attended a class on nutrition and cancer, taught by Miles Hassell, M.D., director of Integrative Medicine for Providence Cancer Center. “Suddenly,” she says, “I had something to hold onto. Rather than thinking about what I couldn’t eat in my world, I had a checklist of what I had to eat, and that gave me a great power and discipline. Every morning, I woke up with this checklist: I was going to eat my berries and tomatoes, my garlic and onion, my fish and all my greens. It gave me great confidence that I was doing something for me, that I could control. And I believe that all the good nutrition that I put into my body gave me a strength to heal. It made me get through chemotherapy quite handily, actually. I never really got sick.”

In fact, Victoria continued to work throughout her entire course of treatment, taking just one week off through it all. Because she loves her work with a passion, that was important to her.

Not everything was smooth sailing, however. Like many people who go through chemotherapy, Victoria experienced incredible sensitivity to touch. Her mouth hurt. Her hair fell out.

“I will never forget when my hair fell out,” she says. “It doesn’t come out over a period of time; it

comes out right then – two days, three days, it’s gone. I was getting ready for work, blow-drying my hair, and it was like a Salvador Dali painting – the blow-dryer was literally blowing my hair off my head!”

Victoria dealt with it by calling a salon and asking to have her head shaved. “The woman who did it was so great – her mother had gone through cancer, and she was so tender. She said, ‘Victoria, how would you like it?’ And I said, ‘Just let it rip.’ So she took it off. It was emotional, but it was so liberating, too.” Victoria put on a wig to leave the salon, but quickly decided to abandon it in favor of scarves.

“So here you are, a woman,” she says. “You’ve had surgery on your breasts, your hair’s not there – none of it’s there – and you look in the mirror, and you think, this is real. And then you just dig deep, and you go on.” And day by day, month by month, she did.

Victoria believes that the current medical advances, as well as all the advancements to come through research, are going to make it possible for people to keep cancer at bay and live a long life. “It is so important that this research continues, and that we support it,” she says. “There are many generations coming behind us, and it’s only research that will help cure cancer, and help people manage it, and ease the path when people are going through it.”

Providence Cancer Center

2004 Highlights

Providence Cancer Center is the single largest provider of cancer services in Oregon and one of the country’s premier cancer care and research programs. In the Portland area alone, Providence Cancer Center cares for more than 3,000 newly diagnosed patients each year.

- In March, the Integrative Medicine Program, part of Providence Cancer Center, opened its first clinic. Located at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center, the clinic offers cancer patients the services of naturopaths, an acupuncturist and a massage therapist, as well as a schedule of classes on cancer nutrition, exercise and related subjects.
- Significant funding continues to support the study of OX40, a promising immunotherapy discovery made by scientists at the Robert W. Franz Research Center in the Earle A. Chiles Research Institute. The funding included a \$1.5 million grant to the center from the National Institutes of Health.
- In July, the Gamma Knife Center of Oregon treated its 500th patient.
- A major drive was launched to break ground on a new, state-of-the-art Cancer Pavilion at Providence Portland Medical Center, and to expand cancer care facilities at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center.

Donations of any size help us make a difference in the lives of the people we serve. To make a donation to Providence Cancer Center, please call 503-215-6386 or visit www.providence.org/together.