

Surviving Stage IV Ovarian Cancer

“The Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center was my safety net.”

Family practice nurse Pamela Briggs always thought herself “healthy as a horse,” until she was diagnosed with Stage IV ovarian cancer that had already spread to the surface of her bladder. “I knew immediately that I wanted to go to Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center. That was my safety net,” recalls Briggs.

Within minutes of meeting Arlan F. Fuller, Jr., MD, director of the Gillette Center for Gynecologic Oncology, and chief, Vincent Gynecologic Oncology Division, Briggs said she felt immediately calm. “He said to me, ‘You need surgery. You need it now. I already have you booked for next week. If we’re lucky, I can bring you back to a state of minimal pelvic disease, which is treatable with chemotherapy.’”

During an 8-hour surgery, Fuller removed the ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes, and, in extremely delicate procedures, he “peeled away” tumors from the bladder and intestines, without harming those organs.

After the surgery, Fuller invited Briggs to participate in a clinical trial for *intraperitoneal* (IP) chemotherapy. (See “Ovarian Cancer,” page 6) “At first I was frightened,” says Briggs. “But I did very well. I didn’t lose my hair, just some thinning, and they gave me medication to control the nausea. Because the chemo goes directly into the abdomen instead of through a vein, which can burn out, they can give you more frequent doses of chemotherapy so you can hit the cancer hard and fast, right where it is.”

Within two weeks of finishing IP chemotherapy, Briggs was back at work full-time. She has been cancer-free for more than a year, and is glad to be at the Cancer Center: “As soon as I saw that Dr. Fuller was an author or co-author of most of the textbooks on his shelf, I knew that I was in the right place.” ■