

The Human Side Of Cancer Care At Eastchester

For Sarah S., the date September 11, 2001, is significant for more than one reason. Sarah received the biopsy results from a routine mammogram on Monday, September 10, and began calling surgeons on Tuesday. Because of the terrorist attacks, appointments were being cancelled. Barbara nevertheless was able to get an appointment that same day with Dr. Nella Irene Shapiro at Eastchester Center for Cancer Care.

Dr. Shapiro recommended that she have a lumpectomy and that she continue with chemotherapy and radiation treatments under the care of Dr. Anthony Hoffman, Eastchester's president. Her treatments began in November 2001 and continued until May 2002.

Since Sarah is a nurse, she was more aware of the medical aspects of her care than the average patient. She has worked at Montefiore Medical

Center's Critical Care Unit and has taught Critical Care Nursing at Maimonides. Sarah is married and has three children — one in high school and two in college. She enjoys needlepoint, and is working on her fifth *tefillin* bag for a nephew who will be having his bar mitzvah this year.

For her appointment with Dr. Hoffman, Sarah brought a friend, someone who had received treatment for breast cancer a few years earlier — a smart move, she explains. Having someone else along insures that important information won't be forgotten in the stress of the moment.

Looking back at her treatment at ECCC (formerly Sciode Medical Center), Mrs. S. says she liked the fact that it was small and cozy as compared with the institutional feel of many hospitals, that seems to reinforce the feeling of "sickness." Eastchester's warm atmosphere made her feel comfortable and less "sick" even though she was a patient. Blood tests were performed right on premises, so results were quickly available. Flexible appointments made it easy for her to maintain her daily schedule, and having her chemo treatments scheduled for early in the week meant she would feel well enough to prepare for the Sabbath.

In addition, all the food and drinks were kosher. Sarah S. has several pieces of advice to give to other patients:

"Write your questions in advance of meetings with

doctors," she says, "and always take notes. This way, you have accurate information you can refer to when discussing care options with others, and making decisions about which doctor or treatment to use."

She advises bringing someone along, as she did, during initial meetings with doctors when discussing treatment options — "because you don't always know the questions to ask and you don't always hear everything that's being said." Sarah's friend provided insights from her own experience and was able to ask knowledgeable questions the average person wouldn't think of.

Finally, she asserts, you don't have to go to a well-know cancer facility like Sloan Kettering to get excellent cancer care.

Sarah's treatment by the doctors and staff at Eastchester was exemplary. When she developed an infection during initial chemo treatments that caused her to spend three weeks in the hospital, Dr. Hoffman came to see her every day except on the Sabbath — when Dr. Volterra came instead.

The initial consultation with Dr. Hoffman lasted a good hour and a half, during which he explained everything clearly and thoroughly. Sarah's friend told her, "Go here for your treatment." In fact, her friend was so impressed that she herself switched doctors and became a patient of Dr. Hoffman.

Drs. Hoffman and Volterra show a genuine concern for their patients. To illustrate, when Sarah's mother became ill, Dr. Hoffman went to visit her in the hospital. And when he explained to Sarah that during chemotherapy most patients lose their hair and that she might want to consider getting a wig, he even offered that his wife would help her find and get fitted for one.

Sarah uses the Yiddish word *mensch* to describe her doctors — meaning, as she explains, someone who is honorable and decent — "a first-class person." ■