

For 72 year old John Sumner, retirement was going well. He was spending time on the golf course and working part time at McBride's Printing in Godfrey, IL – something he calls a hobby instead of a job.

Although he had smoked for more than 50 years, lung cancer didn't seem like a real threat. The Rosewood Heights man wasn't showing any symptoms that concerned him.

"I had been a smoker ever since I was a teenager. Not heavy-heavy, not even a pack a day, but I always smoked," said Sumner.

But when he heard about Low Dose CT screening available at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center in Alton, he thought that additional peace of mind might be worth having.

The low dose CT Lung Cancer Screening (LDCT) uses a low-dose chest computerized tomography (CT) scan that can detect lung cancer in asymptomatic patients. Sumner signed up for a scan, and was shocked to find out that he had a mass in the lower lobe of his right lung. A biopsy confirmed that it was malignant, and Sumner was floored.

"I didn't cough, I didn't have any pain, I was healthy," he said. "Needless to say I have quit smoking, and that was very tough."

According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among both men and women in the United States. More than 200,000 new cases are diagnosed each year.

The greatest hope for surviving lung cancer lies in early detection. According to Dr. Wei Lin, a Medical Oncologist at OSF Saint Anthony's, LDCT is an important tool in her cancer fighting arsenal, with real potential to lower the mortality rate from lung cancer. Patients can be diagnosed before symptoms of lung cancer appear.

"If we find it late, then the person is definitely going to have treatment in like a chemo or radiation and there are side effects that come with those treatments. So just like everything else, if we find it early, we can provide a cure, and the treatment will be relatively simpler," said Dr. Lin.

Sumner had his mass surgically removed. He is in remission and says that making the call to get screened saved his life. Dr. Lin agrees.

"My advice to anybody who smokes, anybody who has been around smokers, whatever, it to just get it done," said Sumner. "It was very painless, and it probably saved my life, because probably I would have never had it done if I wouldn't have made that phone call."

"A majority of lung cancer patients present when they have a symptom like a cough, coughing blood, or even shortness of breath," said Dr. Lin. "At that time, typically the cancer is advanced, so the chance for a cure is little. So by doing this, definitely we are able to save more lives and provide curative treatment."

Dr. Lin urges anyone considered high risk for lung cancer to get screened. Those considered high risk are 55 to 74 years old, are a current or former smoker who has quit in the past 15 years and has a smoking history of at least 30-pack years – which means one pack a day for 30 years or two packs a day for 15 years.

To learn more about Low Dose CT Screenings and to find out what is available in your area, please visit OSFHealthCare.org.