

A Helping Hand, from Screening to Recovery

Breast Health Navigators Provide Support

The moment a person is diagnosed with breast cancer can be overwhelming, and some people may feel alone. But no breast cancer patient should face their diagnosis and treatment alone. Finding a shoulder to lean on and a hand to hold during the journey can make all the difference.

Enter the breast health navigator.

“A breast health navigator is someone that is a guide for a breast patient that comes in from their screening mammogram and moves forward into any additional imaging, diagnoses, treatment and recovery,” explained Melissa Bolin, the breast health navigator at OSF Sacred Heart Medical Center in Danville, Illinois.

The [National Cancer Institute](#) says one in three people with cancer experiences mental or emotional distress. It's most common in breast cancer.

According to Bolin, many of the challenges cancer patients face in the months after diagnosis will be new, and patients can expect a range of emotions.

The breast health navigator is designed to be the single point of contact for the patient and family, and serve as an educator, an advocate and a friend who coordinates patient care, verifies and coordinates appointments, and is there to support the patient, both physically and emotionally.

“It's more of a comfort, I feel, for the patients when you have somebody to guide you, hold your hand and answer any questions. They feel like they have somebody in their corner,” remarked Bolin. “If somebody were diagnosed, I would want them to feel like they have a shoulder to lean on, somebody to talk to and answer questions. To take away that fear that they may have.”

Bolin isn't only an advocate for those diagnosed with cancer. Breast health navigators are also armed to help ease screening anxieties.

It is recommended that women of average risk start getting annual mammograms at age 40, and yet, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), only 65% have done so in recent years.

Whether you fear the discomfort in having a mammogram or fear the news of abnormal results, Bolin says she and her colleagues are ready to help ease those anxieties.

“When it comes to the first mammogram, comfort is the biggest thing – to know that they have somebody here that knows what they are going through and can guide them through the process,” said Bolin. “Even if it is just a screening and they do not go any further until coming back the following year for another screening, we want them to feel that comfort and get excited to come see us, rather than nervous.”

Routine care and annual screenings remain the best way to manage breast health. Detecting breast cancer at its earliest stage is the main goal of patient care and breast health.

OSF HealthCare wants everyone to have better access to advanced imaging, so current patients can now self-schedule their screening mammogram through their [OSF MyChart](#) account, or online at osfhealthcare.org/mammo.