

PRINT SCRIPT-Planting the Seed for Better Breast Cancer Treatment

Hearing a doctor tell you have cancer is devastating. For 63 year-old Alice Fillback of Godfrey, Illinois, her breast cancer diagnosis last year was more than an emotional blow.

“Anytime anyone who has a family member who died from breast cancer, or even had breast cancer, that’s the first thing that pops into my mind, ‘Oh my gosh, my sister died from the same thing they’re telling me I have,’” she recalls.

Fillback discovered an unusual lump during a self-breast exam but, at first, she didn’t worry. She decided to call her primary care doctor who ordered a mammogram, followed by a breast ultrasound and then a biopsy that confirmed she had cancer.

Scared and in shock, Fillback began her consultations and treatment approach with Dr. Alejandro Sanz, a physician and surgeon who specializes in breast cancer surgery. After learning she had a treatable form of cancer that was caught early, Fillback gained confidence that as she put it, “It wasn’t going to take me out like it did my sister.”

She barely remembers a short procedure done by a radiologist to place a tiny magnetic seed into the soft tissue of her breast the day before her lumpectomy. It would be used during surgery to guide Dr. Sanz to the location of her tumor.

Fillback recalls, it was quick and painless.

“I was able to go on with my day, the day before surgery and get ready for the hospital. I remember cleaning my house and I’m honestly sure it didn’t hurt because I was able to clean the house and get ready for my hospital stay.”

Following radiation, Fillback is now cancer free and back to her usual routines.

Dr. Sanz pioneered the use of [Magseed](#) technology at OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center in Alton when he began using it earlier this year. It replaces the traditional method of tumor marking by feeding a guide wire into the breast and “hooking” the tumor. The wire extends outside the body and has to be taped to the skin. The surgeon then follows the wire to perform the lumpectomy.

“That could sometimes be traumatic to patients, causing pain and other problems like the wire can get dislodged or something can happen and usually that takes several hours in order for that to get placed, Dr. Sanz explains.

Allowing the magnetic seed to be inserted into the breast with a simple procedure weeks or days in advance makes for a shorter time in the hospital the day of surgery. According to Dr. Sanz, using a metal detector-like probe, guided by the magnetic seed, allows for a more targeted approach for tumor removal.

“We use these technologies so we can treat exactly where the tumor is located, remove less amount of tissue from the breast which I know is important to many of our patients, but at the same time we offer a good, safe, oncology procedure,” he says.

Most importantly, breast cancer patients have the same outcomes but better recovery and a much better experience than the wire-guided approach that has been used for decades.

Breast Health Navigator and breast cancer survivor Heather Jones agrees. Jones was with Alice Fillback through her seed implantation and says it was so much better than what she went through nine years ago battling breast cancer. After a quick local anesthetic is applied, Jones says patients are in and out in no time.

She explains, “It takes about five minutes at most from the time you get numbed up and the time you get it (the seed implanted). You go down and you get a picture with a mammogram and you go home. It’s very simple, very easy. The radiologists are in and out so I don’t have to block a lot of time for these patients to come in and it just makes that whole flow for them (patients) so much better.”

Jones points out OSF Saint Anthony’s is the only hospital in the region offering magnetic seed marking for breast cancer surgery. Jones is also excited about a related advancement coming soon.

Before the end of the year, Dr. Sanz expects to begin using [Magtrace](#). Instead of using radioactive dye, the iron oxide nanoparticle is absorbed and stays in the lymph system, allowing surgeons to find the sentinel node for removal and biopsy during breast cancer surgery. The biopsy can determine if cancer has spread beyond the initial tumor.

[Learn more](#) about the cancer care options available to you through OSF HealthCare.