

REVOLUTIONIZING CANCER CARE... One Patient at a Time

For residents of the Lehigh Valley, cancer treatment for women is now more personalized—and accessible—than ever.



Israel Zigelboim, MD
Gynecologic Oncologist

“LIVING MY OWN EXPERIENCE...”



When Melba Tolliver made a routine appointment at a women’s services center, the last thing she expected to hear was “there’s a problem.” She was referred to St. Luke’s Cancer Center and was diagnosed with endometrial cancer.

“There will always be unpredictable occurrences in our lives, but a cancer diagnosis is one of the scariest,” she says. “Dr. Zigelboim was excellent at answering my questions in a direct manner, and my radiation oncologist, Dr. Nicholas Cardiges, had an authentically sunny disposition. I felt that I was in good hands.”

Surgery was scheduled on her birthday, which Melba says was fortuitous: “I knew I’d fall asleep, have the procedure, and awake reborn.” She then went through rounds of chemotherapy and radiation and lauds the nursing staff as her

true heroes throughout the process. “I’m one person concerned about my own condition, but nurses care for multitudes of people,” she says. “I can’t say enough about their character.”

Now, Melba practices restorative yoga and water aerobics, as well as meditation. “I want St. Luke’s to know how much I appreciate them, and I wanted to share how I came to appreciate living in the present moment, living my own experience,” she says.

“I’m proud to do things I never thought I could do!”

After working at some of the nation’s largest, most respected cancer centers, Dr. Israel Zigelboim says that what sets St. Luke’s University Health Network Cancer Center apart is its personal touch.

“At larger centers, patients may feel lost in the system,” he says. “St. Luke’s is special, and it shows as soon as patients walk into our offices. We treat patients like our own family, not like part of an assembly line.”

This individualization is important because cancer is a group of diseases with many subtypes, Dr. Zigelboim explains, all of which lead to very different disease behaviors, effects on patients, and treatment requirements.

“Our first step is education,” he says. “We try to provide patients with a realistic understanding of their case. When creating treatment plans, we’re smart about targeting each individual cancer and understanding patients’ preferences. Often, more than one type of treatment can be equally effective.”

For some patients, that may mean chemotherapy, radiation therapy, molecular therapy, or immunotherapy. For others, it may mean electing to participate in a clinical trial, where patients are assured they’ll never receive a placebo and still be treated by the St. Luke’s team.

“We support patients throughout their journey,” says Dr. Zigelboim, noting St. Luke’s support groups, cancer counselors, nurse navigators, genetic counselors, and financial counselors, as well as community resources. “Our hearts are in the right place.”

St Luke’s
Cancer Center

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