

## Team Approach, Specialization Make a Difference in Breast Cancer Care

“I could tell by people’s reactions that the news wasn’t going to be good,” Chrissie Wagner says.

But Wagner decided then and there that she wasn’t going to let cancer steal a moment of her life; she’d seen this all before with her mother who had battled breast cancer for 23 years and who had lost her fight just eight years prior.

Wagner received treatment at St. Luke’s Cancer Center, where her mom had previously been treated with quality, compassionate care.

“I’ll never forget the first time I spoke with Dr. Riley,” she recalls. “He said I would be fine. ‘The situation is serious, and we need to move forward quickly,’ he said, ‘but you’ll be fine.’ Five years later, I’m the healthiest I’ve ever been.”

### Treatment Options

Lee Riley, MD, PhD, FACS, Medical Director for Oncology Clinical Integration, has been with St. Luke’s since 1997. His goal was to bring concierge-style medicine to the Lehigh Valley while also encouraging specialization. He introduced the concept of disease management teams to St. Luke’s, which has resulted in improved patient outcomes.

“St. Luke’s is also a leader in advanced technology,” Riley says and points to a number of “firsts” as evidence of the center’s place in the field. St. Luke’s was the first in the area to offer intraoperative radiation therapy, sentinel lymph node biopsy, and second-generation genomic testing.

Today St. Luke’s physicians use information gleaned from genetic testing to dictate treatment protocols, and the center offers five radiation options, including intraoperative radiation therapy—radiation that is administered during surgery directly to the area where the cancer is.

Riley and the rest of the St. Luke’s team are also committed to enrolling patients in clinical trials as appropriate, including trials involving immunotherapy, an interest of Riley’s since college. The greatest breakthroughs in cancer treatment, he suggests, will come in immunotherapy.

“Chemotherapy and radiation therapy will likely still be the primary strategies for eliminating most cancer,” he says. “But immunotherapy will be how we get rid of the last of a patient’s cancer cells. If and when we can boost the immune system against cancer, the body will search for affected cells for potentially years as opposed to days with chemotherapy.”

### A Positive Outcome

“I wish I could infuse all my patients with her energy and outlook,” Riley says of Chrissie Wagner.

Wagner’s cancer was aggressive. Ultimately she underwent chemotherapy, radiation, mastectomy, and reconstructive surgery.

“Everyone at St. Luke’s, they were just a godsend. I never doubted the prescribed course of action, and while it wasn’t easy, it was well worth the journey,” Wagner says.

Riley, meanwhile, describes her as an ideal patient from whom he learned the value of a positive outlook and a strong will. She is, he says, a role model.

Today, five years after she has been declared cancer-free, Wagner is living her best life, welcoming every day with her husband of 33 years and her daughters and their families.

“Life is beautiful,” she says. “Don’t waste a second.”

Chrissie Wagner was 46 years old when she felt a lump in her breast. She was subsequently diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer by way of an ultrasound mammogram and biopsy.



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