



Dr. Christie Hilton (right) comforting a metastatic breast cancer patient (left) at the AHN Glimmer of Hope Clinic.

## A Glimmer of Hope Through Comprehensive Care

The AHN Glimmer of Hope Metastatic Breast Cancer Clinic at Allegheny General Hospital reduces wait times and streamlines appointments so patients can focus on what brings them joy.

“When I was growing up, my mother’s best friend had metastatic breast cancer,” says Christie Hilton, D.O., director of the AHN Glimmer of Hope Metastatic Breast Cancer Clinic at Allegheny General Hospital. “We spent a lot of time walking with her in the evenings while she was undergoing her treatment. When she passed away, it was the first and only time I’ve seen my mother cry. Today, I help amazing women through the hardest time in their life.”

Metastatic breast cancer, or stage IV breast cancer, has no cure, but some women live more than 10 years after receiving a diagnosis. According to the National Cancer Institute, approximately 168,000 women in the United States are living with the disease, and the five-year survival rate is increasing. State-of-the-art care from organizations like the AHN Glimmer of Hope Metastatic Breast Cancer Clinic have been crucial in making this possible.

Patients with metastatic breast cancer are asked to do so much: echocardiograms, chemotherapy, and other appointments that interrupt their day-to-day lives. Dr. Hilton and her team at AHN Cancer Institute centralize appointments and decrease waiting room times so patients can focus on what truly matters.

Individual treatment plans reflect each patient’s needs. One woman in her 20s came to the clinic with shortness of breath even though previous imaging scans showed no abnormalities. She was taken in for a CT scan, which showed pleural effusion (a collection of fluid between the lungs and chest wall). A pulmonologist drained the fluid, and Dr. Hilton sent the sample to a researcher studying pleural effusions with the patient’s consent. The patient is now being considered for a clinical trial. While waiting for a remote appointment with a

cardio-oncologist, the patient went across the hall to receive a massage paid for by Glimmer of Hope. This all happened at the same location within just a few hours.

“In the medical field, people say this can’t be done. It’s expected you wait for weeks or months for follow-up appointments,” says Dr. Hilton. “We have the most amazing physicians. I’ve never gotten a ‘no’ when I’ve asked, ‘She really needs help; is there any way she can be seen today?’ It makes a difference.”

The clinic continues to prioritize innovation in care to make the treatment journey more comfortable and effective. One addition on the horizon is an on-site therapist dedicated to helping women navigate the emotional aspects of metastatic breast cancer.

“Women take care of everyone else,” says Dr. Hilton. “I am so blessed to work with a team who is so willing to rally around the women who come to our clinic.”

At the **AHN Glimmer of Hope Metastatic Breast Cancer Clinic**, care plans are created to improve patients’ quality of life:

- Patients are guided through treatment by a nurse navigator who reviews all aspects of their treatment so nothing falls through the cracks.
- Innovative treatments centered on patient comfort, such as the use of a scalp-cooling cap for hair preservation, are currently in the works.
- Patients are screened for clinical trials at every stage of their treatment journey.

