

# "RIGHT-SIZING" BREAST CANCER CARE FOR WOMEN IN SOUTH CAROLINA



***"I don't care what you do. Just get this cancer out."***

That's a sentiment that Dr. Andrea Abbott has heard before. She understands how women facing a breast cancer diagnosis would be willing to undergo anything to be cancer-free.

But as a surgical oncologist and medical director of the Comprehensive Breast Program at MUSC Hollings Cancer Center, she also knows that, sometimes, less is more. Using the latest clinical research to tailor treatment to the woman in front of her, instead of throwing everything plus the kitchen sink at the problem, lessens side effects while providing the most effective treatment.

"At MUSC Hollings Cancer Center, the only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center in South Carolina, our doctors are developing and conducting clinical trials, participating in groundbreaking research at a national level, and working with colleagues across the country to stay ahead of the curve and implement the latest data into clinical practice," Abbott said.

While it usually takes about five years for new treatment guidelines to trickle down to the majority of oncology practices, that's not the case at Hollings.

"You don't have to wait five years for cutting-edge treatments. We're incorporating recently released clinical trial data to right-size treatment for patients right here, right now," she said.

For example, in Radiation Medicine, Dr. Jennifer Harper and her colleagues are incorporating newer data that can allow for less radiation—or even no radiation.

The key is getting very specific information about the type of breast cancer that a woman has and understanding how that fits into clinical guidelines.

"Breast cancer is not all one thing. There is a spectrum," Harper said. "We're omitting radiation therapy for patients with Stage 1 estrogen-driven breast cancer who are 65 or older because the benefit is relatively small, and it doesn't change overall survival."

For other women, less radiation is effective.

"We're utilizing partial breast irradiation to shorten the duration of radiation therapy—so instead of several weeks of radiation, it's a five-day course

of treatment. And instead of treating the whole breast, we're treating the area around the lumpectomy cavity. That dramatically lowers side effects and shortens treatment time," Harper said.

In surgery, Abbott and her colleagues use new technology to offer more precise operations. One example is the Molli 2 system.

Molli 2 helps surgeons pinpoint the location of a lesion within millimeters, meaning they can remove less tissue and still be more accurate in targeting cancerous tissue. And that precision means less chance that a re-excision, or second surgery, will be needed. The national re-excision rate is over 20%; it's less than 10% at Hollings.

The breast team has also incorporated new research guiding lymph node removal.

Lymph nodes have traditionally been removed during surgery to determine if cancer cells traveled beyond the breast. Unfortunately, removing lymph nodes can cause side effects like lymphedema, which can lead to painful swelling.

But new clinical trials have produced better information about when to remove lymph nodes.

"Because of advances in every domain of breast cancer care, we don't always need that lymph node component," Abbott said. "It's about downsizing or 'right-sizing' treatments so people aren't over-treated. If I can treat patients accurately but also get them back to playing golf or pickleball and picking up their children or grandchildren, I consider that a win-win."



## INNOVATIVE CARE. COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT.

You're in good hands at MUSC Hollings Cancer Center, South Carolina's only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center. Our breast cancer doctors are dedicated to giving all patients the most effective and personalized treatments available, including access to the latest innovations in breast cancer diagnostics, treatments, clinical trials, advanced surgical techniques, support services and survivorship planning.



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An NCI-Designated Cancer Center

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