

Take me to St. Mark's Hospital: Compassionate care for colon cancer

At 36 years old, Gentry focused on his career, his wife and their much-anticipated baby girl – colon cancer was nowhere on the radar.

March 13, 2024



Gentry Smith, a zealous 36-year-old, focused his energy on career development, his wife, and their much-anticipated baby girl. He felt healthy, happy and successful. Cancer was nowhere on the radar.

Since he worked between 80 and 100 hours per week, often rocked his newborn daughter back to sleep throughout the night, and ran 3 miles each morning before work, it's no wonder the ER doctor pointed toward exhaustion when Gentry passed out on the bathroom floor. It seemed obvious; but then the physician reviewed Gentry's blood work results.

"He walked in and said, 'Your bloodwork says something is *really* wrong,'" Gentry remembered. "He suggested seeing some specialists as soon as possible, and by a miracle, I was able to schedule with all of them that very week."

One of the specialists, a gastroenterologist, requested a CT scan of Gentry's abdomen.

"The scan showed a potential malignancy, so they added a special colonoscopy session for me the next morning at 6 a.m. That's not the phone call you want to get," Gentry said.

With no family history of cancer and being considerably younger than the average person diagnosed with the disease, Gentry and his wife, Carly, felt completely shocked by a colon cancer diagnosis.

"Carly and I had some difficult conversations ... We spent a long time considering how we would handle the worst-case scenario. For the past five years, we had worked hard to get my daughter into the world with IVF. What would it be like if I wasn't there by her side throughout

life?” Gentry said. “That was the hardest part to face. I knew I wanted to be there for my family ... and I knew I’d need the best possible physicians.”

A team approach to cancer care

When Gentry met [Dr. Michelle Murday](#), a renowned colon and rectal surgeon at [St. Mark’s Hospital](#) and Associates in Colon and Rectal Surgery who has more than 25 years of experience, Gentry knew right away that he had found an instrumental and irreplaceable part of his cancer team.

“What was most important to me was that I was getting the best care. I could not care less about what name was on the side of the building, what mattered to me was the caliber of those performing care at the facility. That’s why I wanted to go to St. Mark’s – they had Dr. Murday, one of the top surgeons for what I needed done,” Gentry said.

Dr. Murday wasn’t the only expert homed in on Gentry’s case. Dr. Murday presented the details of Gentry’s situation to a Tumor Board, formed by expert oncologists, radiologists, surgeons, pathologists, specialized nurses and more. They discussed Gentry’s scans and diagnosis before recommending aggressive treatments of chemotherapy and radiation to shrink the tumor, followed by surgical removal of the tumor and surrounding tissue.

For six weeks, Gentry received targeted radiation therapy, Monday through Friday; he simultaneously took an oral chemo drug. Then, for 4.5 months, he received a chemotherapy regimen through a port. Though accompanied by unpleasant side effects, the treatments did their job: The tumor shrunk from 6 cm to less than 0.5 cm!

Next came surgery. Dr. Murday and a highly trained surgical team at St. Mark’s Hospital removed 11 inches of Gentry’s large intestines and more than 20 lymph nodes. Thankfully, all the lymph nodes and intestine biopsies came back clear of cancer. To help Gentry’s body heal from the major surgery, Dr. Murday created a temporary ileostomy, or opening in the belly connected to the small intestine, allowing waste to bypass the large intestine while it healed. Six weeks later, Dr. Murday reversed the ileostomy; reconnecting Gentry’s small and large intestines.

Though the experience wasn't easy, Gentry said the medical teams he worked with provided expertise, compassion and kindness that made a difference.

"I noticed that the physicians I met with started by telling me, 'You're part of our family now' ... and though I appreciated what they said, their actions throughout the process spoke even louder," Gentry said. "They made me feel like I was a human being. They went out of their way to get to know me, my wife and my child. I was never a name on a medical chart, I was someone they treated as a person and wanted to make sure I got the help I needed."

Lessons learned from his colon cancer experience

Nearing the one-year mark for completing cancer treatments, life looks different for Gentry – and that's on purpose.

"Before cancer, I focused on how to continue climbing the corporate ladder, but I've realized I don't have to work that much to have the impact I'm hoping for. Now, I work 40 hours a week and spend the rest of the time with my family," Gentry said. "I know it's important to be grateful for what you have today because you don't know what you'll have tomorrow."

Gentry also noted that, while cancer doesn't discriminate against age and never shows up at an opportune time, he learned it doesn't always mean a death sentence.

"There's so much more hope today than there would have been 5, 10 or 15 years ago if you had the same diagnosis. And there will be even more hope tomorrow than today because treatments are advancing so fast!" Gentry said. "Hope isn't lost – so hold onto hope and find the best doctors possible."

At St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah, our oncology experts are experienced in providing an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment plan for cancer. To learn more about our Cancer Support Services team, [visit us online](#) or call us at [\(801\) 268-7013](tel:8012687013).

To schedule a colonoscopy or find a provider, call [\(801\) 715-4152](tel:8017154152).