



Pauline Avery

Treatment for Colon Cancer
from Emerson and Mass General



Pauline Avery wasn't concerned about her gastrointestinal symptoms – mild stomach pain and bowel changes – but her primary care physician was. Last fall, Betty Pomerleau, MD, at Lincoln Physicians scheduled Ms. Avery for a CT scan, which revealed a mass in her colon. A colonoscopy provided a more detailed diagnosis: colon cancer. Friends suggested that she head to Boston, but the Maynard resident, who is 40, kept her care at Emerson Hospital and the Mass General Cancer Center at Emerson Hospital-Bethke and is glad she did. Ms. Avery's chemotherapy will be over soon, and she is looking forward to enjoying the summer.

Pauline Avery, shown with Miles and Zoe, says she's "in good hands" at Emerson.

"The first thing I knew was that I needed to have surgery. Dr. Raj Devarajan, who performed the colonoscopy and made the diagnosis, encouraged me to make an appointment with Dr. Atif Khan. He said Dr. Khan is a great surgeon, and if he needed surgery himself, he would choose Dr. Khan. He also said Emerson had great surgical facilities.

"I was able to see Dr. Khan the following week, and he explained that he could perform the surgery laparoscopically, through small incisions. I was concerned about having laparoscopic surgery for cancer; I was unsure how cancer could be removed that way. He assured me that it would be effective, as well as easier on me. He also said there was a slight chance he might have to convert to performing a traditional, open surgery.

"Dr. Khan was very thorough, and he also really listened to me. I told him I was scared to death, and he said 'Of course you are.' I appreciated that. I felt a real compassion from him.

"I decided to prepare for my surgery by taking the course 'Prepare for Surgery, Heal Faster,' which helps you to relax. My surgery was on a Wednesday, and I went home on Friday. Dr. Khan was right about laparoscopic surgery; I needed minimal pain medication in the hospital, and I only took a few Tylenols when I got home. I was told to eat a low-fiber diet, and it didn't agree with me. Dr. Khan was great; I had to call him about it, and he was very helpful.

"In December, I began chemotherapy. I told Dr. [Susan] Sajer, my medical oncologist at Emerson, that I was considering getting a second opinion. She told me that I was welcome to do that, and she carefully explained that, for my stage of colon cancer, the treatment is well-defined and can be easily

managed there. Dr. Sajer is direct but very compassionate. She told me I was going to get through it. I respect her, and I trust her.

"So far, I've only had one period of time when I was really sick with side effects from the chemotherapy. Overall, I'm tired and occasionally feel nauseous, which is hard, because I'm a high-energy person. Through Emerson, I receive vouchers for acupuncture treatments, which I have three times a week, as well as for massage therapy. I had my kids at Emerson, and I feel like I'm in good hands there.

"My prognosis is good, but it hasn't been easy. Something like this is life-changing. I've stopped googling colon cancer because I need to keep a positive mind. I've changed my diet, and I'm taking good care of myself. I want to have a hand in my recovery, or at least have some control over it.

"In March, my husband and I went to Maine for the weekend. One day, I snowboarded for four hours straight. We ate great and slept great. I felt totally normal, and it was amazing – like life was back to being the way I like it.

"When you have cancer, it's easy to feel like 'why is this happening to me?' But I sit in the infusion center at Emerson and see how people manage to go on with their lives. They talk about their kids, their vacations, where they're going out to eat.

"Before I had my kids, I was a psychotherapist, working in a boys' residential program. I love leading groups, and I'm trained in the expressive arts. So I have daydreams in my head about working with people who have cancer. That will happen when I'm strong enough to be a source of strength to others.

"For now, I plan to finish the chemo and have a nice summer."

