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Leukemia,
lymphoma
and cancers of
the blood

Routine checkup and revolutionary care

Madisonville man's life after surprise cancer diagnosis

By Amanda McElfresh | amcelfresh@theadvocate.com
This article is brought to you by Our Lady of the Lake.

When Ed Carruthers collapsed while replacing a battery in his truck, he assumed it was his back acting up again. A former railroad police officer, the Madisonville resident was no stranger to long days, hard work and occasional aches and pains.

"I've had back issues before, so I thought it was just another injury," he said. But the diagnosis turned out to be much more serious: multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer that affects the bone marrow.

Before the diagnosis, Carruthers struggled through a trip to visit family in Arizona with his wife, Ginny. That initial back pain persisted and he lost his appetite. They had vehicle trouble, forcing Carruthers to replace three tires along the way. He suspected his symptoms were due to his back and the stress of the trip. The possibility of cancer never entered his mind, especially since he has no family history of the disease. Once the couple returned home, Carruthers went to his doctor for a routine six-month checkup, complete with bloodwork. A nurse called the next morning with urgent instructions for him to check into the hospital immediately. Three days later, he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

Soon, Carruthers was at Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Institute, where he became the first patient to undergo an autologous bone marrow transplant since the launch of the hospital's Hematologic Malignancy Cell Therapy program.

An autologous transplant is an advanced treatment in which a patient's own stem cells are collected, preserved and reintroduced after high-dose chemotherapy. The procedure helps restore healthy blood cell production while lowering the risks tied to donor transplants. "Stem cell transplantation has

revolutionized outcomes for patients with multiple myeloma and other blood cancers," said Dr. Hana Safah, who leads the program with Dr. Nakhle Saba at Our Lady of the Lake. "We are proud to offer this advanced therapy here in Louisiana so patients don't have to travel out of state for world-class care."

While Carruthers recovered in the hospital with a weakened immune system, Ginny found comfort at the Hogs for the Cause Family Support Home, a nearby residence for families of patients undergoing treatment. The home provided a place of stability during weeks of uncertainty.

"Dr. Safah has an excellent team," Carruthers said. "They took care of me and my wife. Anytime anyone had questions, they answered every one of them."

Today, Carruthers's treatments have shifted from daily to monthly bloodwork. Though he still experiences weakness and tires easily, he is grateful for the progress and hopeful about the future. This summer, he was well enough to travel with Ginny, his children and grandchildren for a weeklong trip to Wisconsin to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

"My regular doctor visits have always been a part of my routine. If I hadn't kept up with those appointments, I never would have known I had cancer," Carruthers said.

"I tell people all the time now to get your checkups and get your bloodwork done. It could save your life."

Ed Carruthers, survivor of multiple myeloma



Hope and healing:

*How Our Lady of the Lake is transforming
blood cancer treatment in Louisiana*

By Amanda McElfresh | amcelfresh@theadvocate.com
This article is brought to you by **Our Lady of the Lake**.

Our Lady of the Lake is reshaping the way Louisianans face blood cancers, combining revolutionary treatments such as stem cell transplants with advanced clinical research and holistic patient support. With a growing team of subspecialized physicians, expanded research capacity and a mission-driven approach, the hospital is creating new hope for patients battling leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma and related conditions.

Blending breakthrough science with human connection

For Dr. Harry Sequeira, the fight against leukemia represents the perfect intersection of science and humanity.

“I chose to specialize in leukemia because it brings together science that is continuously evolving with the opportunity to work with patients and families. New discoveries rapidly translate into real improvements in a person’s quality of life,” said Dr. Sequeira, who specializes in hematology oncology at Our Lady of the Lake. “That combination of hope and progress drew me into the field.” Leukemia treatment has advanced significantly in recent years, with therapies more frequently tailored to each patient. Dr. Sequeira said some of the most transformative developments have been in precision drugs that target specific mutations, immunotherapies that harness the power of a person’s own immune system and stem cell transplants that rebuild healthy bone marrow.

Those treatments are all available at Our Lady of the Lake, which combines cutting-edge therapies with a holistic treatment plan.

“Our team is large and includes physicians, nurses, social workers, a chaplain and others. Everybody does their part to cover every aspect of the patient,” Dr. Sequeira said. “We talk with patients and their families about timelines and what the next steps will be. Our patients have access to the newest therapies and clinical trials, but we also address their emotional and spiritual needs. We don’t just see them as a diagnosis. We approach them as a whole person.”



Dr. Harry Sequeira
Hematology Oncologist



Dr. Hana Safah
Director of Heme-
Malignancy and Cell
Therapy



Dr. Nakhle Saba
Director of Lymphoma/
CLL and CAR-T Therapy
Program

Patient-centered research and specialized care drive better outcomes

When Dr. Nakhle Saba joined Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Institute, he was charged with expanding the hospital’s research portfolio and helping to bring the most innovative treatments to Baton Rouge. Dr. Saba said that commitment to growth and the support of Our Lady of the Lake’s leadership team made the offer one that he couldn’t turn down.

“We have all of the right ingredients here to be successful,” he said. “It was the right kind of challenge for me with a great team and a great location that is close to many different cities in Louisiana.”

Dr. Saba primarily treats patients with lymphoma and chronic leukemia, while colleagues at Our Lady of the Lake focus on other forms of blood cancer, such as myeloma and acute leukemia. That subspecialized model, he said, is key to better outcomes.

“When you focus on just one or two types of cancer, you know it inside and out,” he said. “You have more time to read about clinical developments, breakthroughs and clinical trial results. You can dive deep into the small details that make the difference in the end.”

Dr. Saba said he sees the move away from traditional chemotherapy as a promising development. Instead, treatments are now focused on targeted therapies and specific antibodies. Many of these new innovations are still in the clinical trial phase, and some Our Lady of the Lake patients are candidates. However, Dr. Saba said it is important that no patient ever feels forced to undergo a trial or treatment that doesn’t feel right for them.

“When you talk to patients about clinical trials, you have to make sure they understand that these are totally optional and voluntary,” he said. “There are no strings attached. Whether they say yes or no, their relationship with myself and the hospital will not change.”

Stem cell therapy offers hope for long-lasting impacts

Stem cell transplants are transforming outcomes for patients with blood cancers, and Our Lady of the Lake is quickly becoming a leader in this advanced therapy. Since October 2024, the hospital has performed 14 transplants under the leadership of Dr. Hana Safah, who said the progress is a testament to medical innovation and team collaboration.

Early diagnosis and specialized care define cancer treatment at Our Lady of the Lake

By Amanda McElfresh | amcelfresh@theadvocate.com
This article is brought to you by **Our Lady of the Lake**.

Louisiana patients facing blood cancers are gaining access to some of the most advanced care in the region, thanks to the growing hematology oncology team at Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Institute.

Dr. Hana Safah, Dr. Nakhle Saba and Dr. Harry Sequeira recently took time to discuss the Institute’s continuum of care, from diagnosis to treatment to survivorship. A video of their full conversation can be viewed now at www.theadvocate.com.

Dr. Saba said the three main pillars of cancer care at Our Lady of the Lake are subspecialties, a robust clinical trial research program and access to care. One of Dr. Saba’s particular focuses is on working more closely with Medicaid and insurance companies to ensure that all cancer patients have the same access to treatment options.

At Our Lady of the Lake, those options are growing rapidly with the rise of subspecialties. This means that physicians often focus on only one or two types of cancer, allowing them to delve deeper into personalized treatment.

“The fact that we’re so specialized allows us to give care at the highest level,” said Dr. Sequeira.



Dr. Safah said another aspect of cancer care at Our Lady of the Lake is early diagnosis. In fact, most patients receive their diagnosis within a few days of undergoing tests.

“That’s something you don’t see in community hospitals or practices,” she said. “That’s very important for patients. Having the right diagnosis early on is going to really affect the outcome for the patient.”

Visit ololrnc.com/cancer to learn more about Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Institute.

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