

# Dr. Patricia Rodriguez

**MEDICAL ONCOLOGY**

**VIRGINIA CANCER SPECIALISTS**

**A** **BOUT 10 YEARS AGO, A WOMAN IN HER 70S WITH** multiple myeloma came to see me for a follow-up after her regular oncologist retired. I was immediately struck by the patient's positive attitude and unwavering smile. As we discussed her past treatment for multiple myeloma, she mentioned that she'd previously had breast cancer when she was in her 40s.

As the physician in charge of genetic testing at Virginia Cancer Specialists, I'm very interested in patient histories. I was immediately concerned and asked her about her family history of cancer, as well. Turns out, there were several instances of both breast and ovarian cancer. I knew immediately that this patient was someone who needed genetic testing.

To her credit, the patient quickly agreed, not just out of concern for her own health, but for the health of her daughters and other family members. She was tested, and it was determined that she had the BRCA1 gene mutation, which put her at extensive risk for both breast and uterine cancer. Due to her history with cancer and the discovered gene mutation, the patient decided that after dealing with cancer twice before, she didn't want to go through it again. She opted for a bilateral mastectomy and bilateral oophorectomy. In the meantime, we tested her daughters for the BRCA1 gene and determined that all three were negative for the mutation.

We continued to follow the patient's multiple myeloma, but a few years later, her skin suddenly turned yellow. It was soon discovered that she had bile duct cancer, her third malignancy. Once again, the patient underwent surgery, having her bile ducts removed in a Whipple procedure.

After recovering from surgery, the patient came back to undergo chemotherapy at our office. I was astounded. After all she'd been through, she was still smiling. She told me again how grateful she was that her daughters had tested negative for the BRCA1 gene mutation. Her love for her family came across in every word she spoke, and I was proud to have helped set her mind at ease during those difficult times.

This patient has now been living with cancer for more than 30 years. She has a great quality of life, exercises regularly and eats well, and she's not going to let anything stop her. She's an inspiration to her family—and frankly, to her doctors. She's outliving her cancer, and she's doing it with a smile.





MICHAEL BUTCHER