

northward bound

FLORIDA WOMAN TRAVELS TO SOMERSET MEDICAL CENTER FOR LIFESAVING PROCEDURES

Ivonne Fernandez lives in Scotch Plains, a thousand miles away from her parents. But distance did not disguise the fear in her mother Exzida Fernandez's voice when she called last November and said, "I have cancer."

Ivonne immediately flew to her mother's side in Florida and discovered that her condition was complicated: The 72-year-old had a large cancerous tumor growing in her kidney, another mass in her ovaries and fluid buildup in her lungs.

When Exzida's oncologist in Florida was unable to perform surgery and several other area physicians declined to take her risky case, Ivonne knew it was time to find other options — fast.

After researching the Internet and conferring with others, the family chose Dhiren Dave, MD, a urologic surgeon specializing in oncology at Somerset Medical Center.

"When we learned that Dr. Dave had experience performing surgeries on advanced tumors and everyone we spoke with said that Somerset Medical Center was the best, we felt confident that it was a good decision," Ivonne says.

FACING THE CHALLENGE AS A TEAM

In December, a team of Somerset Medical Center physicians, including Dr. Dave; Marlan Schwartz, MD, chair of obstetrics and gynecology; pulmonologist Nehal Mehta, MD; and medical oncologist Seeta Trivedi, MD, reviewed Exzida's multiple health challenges and designed a customized treatment plan for her.

For the first step, Dr. Dave performed a four-hour "open" surgery to remove the large mass from her kidney. "I try to perform minimally invasive surgery whenever possible, but the tumor in Mrs. Fernandez's kidney was the size of a football and extended into a vein, which did not make her a candidate for minimally invasive surgery," says Dr. Dave.

After surgery, the next step was draining fluid that had accumulated in her chest to avoid breathing complications.

Although it was a very complex surgery, Exzida responded well and was released from the hospital in just five days.

SURGERY, TAKE TWO

After recovering at her daughter's home for a month, Exzida returned to Somerset Medical Center, where Dr. Schwartz surgically removed the benign growth in her ovaries.

"This time, robotic outpatient surgery was appropriate for her and helped to minimize her incisions, blood loss and pain," says Dr. Schwartz. "Robotic technology provided us with 3-D views inside her body and the dexterity to reach her ovarian tumor efficiently."

Exzida is grateful to the Somerset Medical Center team for her dramatic turnaround. "If you are diagnosed with cancer, don't lose faith; keep searching until you find a medical team that excels and makes you feel confident," she says.

Her daughter believes the quality care at Somerset Medical Center was a lifesaver.

"My family and I don't know if my mother could have survived otherwise," says Ivonne. "Everyone at Somerset Medical Center gave 110 percent and when we see my mom thriving and cancer-free now, we know that we absolutely made the right decision to travel a thousand miles for treatment."



▲ Exzida Fernandez and her family are glad she made the thousand-mile trip from Florida to New Jersey for lifesaving surgery at Somerset Medical Center.

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