

## Genetic Counseling



### A Caregiver's Perspective

When my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, I erupted into a mixture of emotions and feelings I just wasn't prepared for. Beyond the constant fight against the actual disease, I was overwhelmed with other questions. What led to my mom's diagnosis? Did I share the same risk factors? What was my risk to also develop this particular type of cancer? Sitting back and thinking about things even more, I began to recall pieces of stories other family members had told about being diagnosed with cancer. Were all these cancers related in some way? Was there something being passed down in my family that could be causing this pattern of cancer?

As I watched my mom battle the disease, I contemplated pursuing the Cancer Risk Evaluation Program at the Joan Karnell Cancer Center, but I was also scared about the process and what information could possibly be uncovered. Would I end up even more terrified about my future? How would this evaluation actually benefit my family and me?

I was surprised how well I could relate to the genetic counselor, and how much she listened to my own personal concerns. I was relieved to hear that the majority of cancer (90-95 percent) is not inherited or passed down through a family, but sporadic in nature and likely caused by a combination of genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors.

As it turns out, I am not at the high level of risk to develop a specific type of cancer I once feared, and I was relieved to find out that my family does not share a lot of the features that families have who are found to have a cancer genetic syndrome (inherited form of cancer(s)). After my evaluation with the genetic counselor and medical oncologist, I was able to breathe a sigh of relief in midst of an overwhelming situation.

I was given specific ways to reduce my risk of cancer including personalized screening recommendations, healthy lifestyle choices, and most importantly, the knowledge to share with family members what I had learned and experienced. It cleared up a lot of the questions and concerns I felt, but had been overwhelmed to talk about with my mom. Now, my only focus is on my mom beating this disease!

*For more information about Genetic Counseling, please contact Beth Souders, MS, CGC, at 215.829.6528 or visit [PennMedicine.org/Karnell](http://PennMedicine.org/Karnell).*