

Betsy Henson - Colon and Liver Cancer Patient Story

Betsy's Story

Late last summer, Betsy Henson was 20 weeks pregnant when she started to feel especially weak. After a few visits to the emergency room for what she thought were severe hemorrhoids, Betsy went in for a colonoscopy.

"I knew it was bad when my doctor said she saw something," Betsy says. Her biopsy revealed the worst-case scenario: colon cancer, at six months pregnant. Betsy's baby girl crowded her small 4'11" frame, which put pressure on the tumor and caused serious bleeding. "They probably caught the cancer just in time,"

Betsy says. "As soon as I was diagnosed, I was determined to get well. I said to myself, 'I have to meet this girl who saved my life.'" UPMC doctors got right to work, using a coordinated team approach to treat Betsy's cancer as well as safeguard her baby.

Her care plan started with several rounds of chemotherapy, followed by surgery to remove the tumors, and all along supported by high-risk pregnancy and neonatal experts at Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC.

Betsy's medical oncologist says, "Since Betsy's cancer had spread from her colon to her liver, chemotherapy was the optimal first treatment, in order to shrink the tumors to make surgery more feasible." Betsy's multidisciplinary team communicated with each other and with her every step of the way. "I took a tour of the NICU early on, and my mind was racing," Betsy says. "I remember the nurse saying, 'Whatever the doctor says needs to be done, we'll take care of it. You take care of you.' She took such a weight off my shoulders."

"All my doctors were awesome, just so personable and so caring. They cried with me at my diagnosis and visited me at Magee after Ellie was born."

A Strong Support System

Betsy's mother, Bonnie, who flew in from Arizona when she heard the news, assembled a team of her own. Bonnie says, "People were praying for Betsy from Singapore to South Africa and in all 50 states." Before the diagnosis, Betsy and her fiancé Joe had picked out a name: Elliana Faith, or Ellie for short. "It was perfect because I knew we'd need faith to get through this," Betsy says. Both Betsy and Ellie weathered the chemotherapy well. "Ellie kicked so much every day that I knew she was okay," says Betsy. "She was so strong that once she kicked my glasses off my belly and across the room!"

Just before Christmas, Betsy's doctors induced labor, and Ellie arrived weighing 6 pounds, 15 ounces – despite being three weeks early. "I remember when Ellie was born, the doctors said, 'She's perfect.' After all of this, she was a miracle," Betsy says. Ellie didn't even require a trip to the NICU.

For a month after Ellie's birth, Betsy had a break from treatment. Chemotherapy had helped shrink the tumors, and now the surgical team was ready to do its part. One unknown remained: how much the cancer had spread to Betsy's liver. Colorectal surgeon Dr. Jennifer Holder-Murray and liver surgeon [Dr. Alan Tsung](#) performed the operation together. It was a success, and Betsy didn't have to lose any of her liver.

By the end of winter, Betsy's medical team pronounced her cancer-free. "All my doctors were awesome, just so personable and so caring," Betsy says. "They cried with me at my diagnosis and visited me at Magee after Ellie was born. I still text one of my nurses almost every day."