

Melissa Watson

Survivor

1 year, 3 months and Counting

My Experiences

Personal Background

General

- 38 years old
- Resides in Des Moines, IA
- Married to Carl for 10 years
- Two sons, Nicholas (7) and Benjamin (4 ½)
- Employed full-time with benefits
- Husband employed full-time with benefits

Personal Background

Family Medical Summary

- Father, deceased (heart attack at age 39)
- Mother, recovering alcoholic with depression/anxiety
- Grandmother (maternal), deceased (breast cancer at age 60)
- Self, medication for depression/anxiety and asthma

Medical Overview

Path to Diagnosis

Symptoms

- Pain/Fullness in right breast
- Nipple Discharge (brown in color)

Path to Diagnosis

Primary Care Physician – 8/7/09

- Prescribed antibiotics for mastitis
- Performed a smear of the discharge
- Referred to a breast surgeon same day
- Scheduled for a mammogram same day

Path to Diagnosis

Breast Surgeon

- Reviewed results of mammogram and ultrasound (Normal) – 8/19/09
- Scheduled a ductogram due to single duct discharge (Inconclusive) – 8/27/09
- Performed a biopsy – 9/4/09

Diagnosis

Pathology

- Extensive Intermediate/High Grade Ductal Carcinoma In-Situ (DCIS)
 - Stage 0
 - Pre-invasive
- Comedo Necrosis
- No clear margins
- ER/PR Positive

Diagnosis

Surgical Recommendations – 9/16/09

- Mastectomy preferred (only) option due to lack of margins
- Discussed Sentinel Lymph Node Mapping due to high-grade status
- Referred for genetic testing (Negative)
- Referred to plastic surgeon for reconstruction options

Diagnosis

Plastic Surgeon – 9/24/09

- Opted for saline-implant with expanders placed at time of mastectomy
- Opted for a bi-lateral mastectomy
 - Mammogram/Ultrasound did not pick up DCIS
 - Symmetry/Balance over time
 - Size of breasts

Surgery and Post-Op

Final Pathology – (Bi-lateral Mastectomy 10/13/09)

- Extensive Intermediate Grade DCIS with central necrosis
- Very Close Margins
- Node Negative
- Cure probable

Surgery and Post-Op

Referred to Radiation Oncologist –10/26/09

- Recommended Radiation (12/14/09-2/14/10)
 - Young Age
 - High Grade Status of Initial Biopsy
 - Close Margins
- Delayed Augmentation of Tissue Expanders
- Pronounced cured following radiation

Surgery and Post-Op

Referred to Medical Oncologist – 10/29/09

- Considered Tamoxifen
 - Not prescribed
- Discussed Chemotherapy
 - Not recommended by medical team

Surgery and Post-Op

Additional Surgeries & Treatments

- Debridement due to post-operative necrosis (11/6/09)
- Removal of right tissue expander due to infection (11/3/10)
- Hyperbaric treatment due to inability of wound to heal properly (ongoing)
- Removal of left tissue expander (surgery pending)

Surgery and Post-Op

Reconstruction

- Made the decision to terminate reconstruction
- Saline-Implant no longer an option
- Not interested in other options due to their aggressive nature

My New Norm

Mental Health

Range of Emotion

How did I feel?

- Afraid
- Lonely
- Grateful
- Loved

Mental Health

Counsel

Who did I want to talk to about breast cancer?

- Medical Community (Doctors, nurses, etc.)
- Therapist
- Girlfriends

Mental Health

Responsibility to Self and Others

What did I do to keep myself together?

- Did whatever it took to make sure I'm alive/well to raise my boys
- Surrounded myself with people I love

Family Life

Emotional Support

How did I help my husband and kids cope emotionally?

- Took an active role in recruiting a support system for me
- Took an active role in recruiting a support system for them

Family Life

Household Logistics

How did I keep the household running smoothly on a day-to-day basis?

- Wrote a plan
- Accepted help
- Let some things go

Employment

Leave Time (Paid/Unpaid)

Did I have leave time and was it paid or unpaid?

- Sick leave provided
- Leave was paid

Employment

Job Security

Would I continue to have the same position and pay when I returned to work and throughout my treatment process?

- Same position and pay
- Extensive prior planning

Health Care System

Education

How did I educate myself, so I could make the best decisions for my care?

- Language Barrier – terminology
- Volumes of Information

Health Care System

Cost

Did I have health insurance and how comprehensive was it? What would be my liability without coverage?

- Yes, with comprehensive coverage
- With no insurance, cost would have been \$166K

Physical Health

Exercise and Nutrition

How will I get back in shape?

- Physical Therapy
- Weight Loss

Physical Health

General Appearance

Am I ok with how I look cosmetically (and what about other people)?

- Short Term – adjustment process
- Long Term – too early to tell

Physical Health

Recurrence and Death

What do I do if I get this again? What if it is untreatable?

- Work to live
- Hope for the best
- Help others

Conclusions