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Illuminating the Fight Against Breast Cancer

Each October, pink lights shine from Blanche Williams' porch in Rome as a reminder to prioritize breast health. For Williams, it's personal: after noticing a change in her breast and seeking care promptly, she was diagnosed with early-stage cancer and is now sharing her story as a survivor.

When Williams woke up one morning and noticed her right breast was discolored and sore to the touch, she didn't hesitate to see her doctor

"I knew it wasn't right for my breast to look like that," she said. "It was not normal, so I got on the phone and made an appointment."

Her physician sent her to get a mammogram at AdventHealth Redmond's Women's Center, even though her routine mammogram just months before had been clear.

"Getting the mammogram every year is very important and keeps you on track with your health," Williams said.

But this time, the screening mammogram detected early-stage breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in women.

“It was smaller than an English pea,” Williams said of the cancer in her breast. Her cancer care team recommended surgery to remove it, along with 20 rounds of radiation. “They didn’t have to take my whole breast,” she said. “They caught it in time.”

The American Cancer Society recommends women at average risk for breast cancer, such as those with no family history of breast cancer, should get an annual mammogram between the ages of 45 and 55, though they may begin as early as 40 years old.

Women who are at high risk for breast cancer, including those who have undergone genetic testing that revealed they have a BRCA or other gene mutation, should consult their physicians for guidance about when to get their first mammogram and how frequently they should repeat screening, according to breast health experts.

“If I have a headache for a week, I know that’s not right, and I’ve got to go and take care of it,” Williams said.

The same, she said, goes for breast health, which is why Williams, 78, has been getting routine mammograms for as long as they’ve been available in her community.

“You cannot hesitate or procrastinate when it comes to your body,” she said. “You’ve got to go see what’s going on with it. Not knowing is not a good thing. You want to know about your body, so therefore you have to pay attention to little signs and things you’re having with your body and go to a doctor that can help you to take care of you and to see what’s going on. It’s very important to do that.”

The Breast Center, formerly known as the Women’s Center, is now located on the first floor of the AdventHealth Cancer Pavilion right next to AdventHealth Stadium. The Breast Center is accredited by the American College of Radiology as a Breast Imaging Center of Excellence

and offers diagnostic and screening mammograms, breast ultrasound, MRI and biopsy care, bone density scans, genetic testing and support groups for cancer patients and their families. The pristine facility and care team provide patients with a comfortable, serene environment for their breast health needs.

The breast team also educates women about the importance of doing regular breast self-exams so they can recognize signs that something may need further investigation by a medical professional.

By heeding that advice and prioritizing her health, Williams said she found out about her cancer early enough to have a positive outcome with her treatment.

“I have a family and I love them and I want to be with them for as long as God allows me to be here,” she said. “I might have been scared, but I prayed and God got me through that. So pay attention to your body. When it’s talking to you, you pay attention and go to the doctor.”

Williams takes a hormone-blocking medication to lower her chance of her cancer returning, and she said she will continue getting mammograms.

“I don’t complain,” she said. “I just know it’s what I have to do.”

Following her cancer diagnosis, Williams started putting pink lightbulbs in her porch lamps each October as part of AdventHealth’s Pink Porch campaign to shine a light on the importance of screening for breast cancer with mammography.

“That’s a beautiful thing, really, to put that pink lightbulb out there,” she said

By doing so, she said she can share her story of survival and encourage other women to advocate for their own health.

“It’s awareness to let people know, ‘Yes, I’m proud to say I had it and I’m surviving with it now,’” she said. “I’m a living witness of it. I’ve been through it. It may be scary, but you come through it.”

For more information on lighting your porch pink, where to pick up a pink bulb or to schedule a mammogram, please visit PinkPorchGA.com.

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About AdventHealth

AdventHealth is a connected network of care that helps people feel whole – body, mind and spirit. More than 105,000 team members across a national footprint provide whole-person care for millions of people annually through more than 2,000 care sites that include hospitals, physician practices, ambulatory surgery centers, outpatient clinics, home health agencies, hospice centers, the AdventHealth app and more. Our wholistic approach to improving the health and prosperity of our communities is inspired by our mission to extend the healing ministry of Christ.