

# Getting back to normal with cancer rehab: OSF Saint Anthony's helps ease treatment side effects

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ALTON - Like any retiree, Arthur Ambrosi has things to do and people to see.

“I’m going to Kansas with all my old buddies. We’re going on a turkey hunt. Last October I was up in Wisconsin fishing for muskies with another old friend,” he said.

But for the 71 year old Alton man, hunting trips and time on the lake are not necessarily guaranteed. Arthur is in a fight for his life. Ambrosi was originally diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2009, and in the following years his doctors discovered tumors on both his spine and liver.

But he isn't letting his diagnosis get in the way of his plans.

"I'm still here," said Ambrosi. "I do good. Some days are diamond, some days are stone, but I keep pushing."

Ambrosi has gone through radiation treatments, as well as various types of chemo to combat his cancer. He is showing remarkable progress, but often cancer treatments that help save a life can have side effects that leave the patient without the quality of life they are used to.

"People who are undergoing cancer treatment or have a cancer diagnosis often have serious side effects that affect their self-care skills, their endurance, their ability to do the things that they want to be able to do, and it affects their quality of life," said Rosanna Harmon, Occupational Therapist at OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center.

For Ambrosi, one of his medications has an effect on his muscles, leaving his legs weak.

"There was a point where I couldn't pick up my foot off the ground," he said.

He alleviates these side effects with regular physical therapy sessions at OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center. OSF HealthCare offers a cancer rehabilitation programs at each of its 11 facilities. According to Kristi Davis, a Speech Pathologist at OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center, the program is designed to minimize treatment side effects and to encourage patients to have the best quality of life possible.

"Cancer rehab is a great program because it allows someone who has cancer to be a cancer survivor, in that instead of being someone who is going through daily treatments, we bring them back to their new normal through exercising, through getting back to swallowing if that's the case – with me it is usually – and getting back to just being a person," remarked Davis.

"You want to be able to get back to the things that you love to do and kind of put the cancer diagnosis behind you," added Harmon.

For Ambrosi, getting his mobility back and regaining a sense of normalcy has given him even more energy to fight the disease.

“I think people’s attitudes are better when they are feeling better, when they know what to do, what not to do, how to modify their activities, so I definitely think there’s even an impact on the mental wellbeing,” said Kelly Bogowith, Lead Therapist at OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center’s Rehabilitation Services. “People have a lot of impairments that are physical, but there’s definitely a psychosocial impact as well on a lot of people.”

“There were days when I was coming, I did not want to come,” recalled Ambrosi. “I felt terrible. My stomach was a mess, and you know, I would come and it was an amazing thing because when I’d leave, I’d always feel better. Not only my muscles, sometimes they would ache from working, but my stomach issues, my mentality, and when I would get home, my wife would see the difference in my attitude.”

OSF HealthCare Cancer Rehabilitation services are available to all survivors in need, whether they are beginning treatment, finished with treatment, or experiencing late effects or unresolved issues from treatment long ago. It’s open to everyone no matter the prognosis, cancer stage, or phase of recovery.

For Arthur, it’s made all the difference in the world.

“I’m here, I’m standing, I’m walking, and I’m going turkey hunting in two weeks,” he said.

To learn more about OSF HealthCare’s Cancer Rehabilitation Program and what is offered at OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center, call (618) 463-5171.