

# Cancer treatment at AMH gives Carlinville woman a leg up

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ALTON – Until this past spring, Sarah Smith thought she was looking at the rest of her life without the bottom part of her left leg. Thanks to cancer treatment at Alton Memorial Hospital, Sarah can now look forward to many more years of activity with her husband and two sons.



Sarah, 42, was diagnosed late in 2016 with synovial sarcoma in her left leg. Following 24 chemotherapy treatments in the winter and spring and six internal radiation treatments at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, she received five weeks (25 days) of radiation therapy at the AMH Cancer Care Center.

“With most sarcomas of the extremities, a multi-disciplinary approach to treatment is necessary for these aggressive cancers and often involve specialized therapies available at limited centers,” said Dr. Gregory Vlacich, medical director of Radiation Oncology at Alton Memorial Hospital. “As part of the wider BJC network, we were able to seamlessly have Mrs. Smith receive her internal catheter radiation treatments at Barnes-Jewish Hospital followed by external beam radiation therapy here in Alton. That way, we are able to maintain continuity of care while offering patients more convenience when possible without compromising the quality of their treatments.”

“Coming to Alton Memorial for radiation treatments was a great experience,” Smith said. “It didn’t take quite as long to get to Alton from Carlinville as when we were going to St. Louis for chemo, and the staff at Alton Memorial was very inviting and professional. They were always prepared for me, very friendly and personal, and everyone was on top of things.”

Perhaps best of all, the convenient parking right outside the Cancer Care Center was a special treat for Smith.

“My leg was hurting much of the time, so being able to park right there was a big help,” she said. “Plus, it’s just such a beautiful campus. It’s almost like a park when you drive in from the street. I had several different people drive me here, and all of them thought the same thing.”

Smith said that amputation just above the knee was the likely path until surgery in St. Louis this spring. That removed the spilled tumor after the chemo had killed some of the spilled cancer cells.

“I had surgery (in Springfield, Ill.) last November where the surgeon cut into and spilled the tumor into my leg,” Smith said. “Before chemotherapy, the surgeon feared that because the tumor was spilled, amputation above the knee would be necessary to remove all the disease. But the surgeon was able to remove the spilled tumor and thus avoid amputation this spring. So amputation was avoided due to the chemo, the radiation and the skill of the surgeon.”

After all treatment, Smith even got to the point where she enjoyed a trip with her family to the Wisconsin Dells.

“As long as the radiation burns were closed, I was able to go down the water slides and do a lot of hiking,” she said. “I’m doing very well now.

“I would definitely recommend Alton Memorial to anyone else in need of cancer treatment. I would tell them not to discount a local hospital. There is top-notch care at Alton Memorial, and they cater to your personal needs.”