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Chatsworth pianist played tunes during cancer treatment visits

DALTON, Ga. (November 11, 2024) – In April, Charlice DeFore stepped out onto the covered balcony at Peeples Cancer Institute, her face to the crowd of providers that had been her care team for the past 16 weeks.

Someone handed her a bronze bell. “There you go — now loud and proud!”

DeFore took the bell, lifted it above her head and rang it, smiling, as everyone clapped and cheered. Her cancer treatments were finished.

DeFore is one of many patients treated at PCI, Hamilton Medical Center’s comprehensive cancer diagnostic and treatment facility in Dalton. After several rounds of radiation and chemotherapy for colorectal cancer, DeFore said she’s grateful for the care she received and encourages others to take heart on their journeys.

DeFore, a Chatsworth resident, discovered her cancer last December after several weeks of bleeding. She knew she was tired but didn’t yet realize the blood loss had caused her to become anemic, so she pushed through fatigue to fulfill family and church obligations.

When she finally saw her doctor and completed bloodwork, she didn’t even make it the rest of the way home before the office called back with orders to go to the hospital for iron and blood transfusions. A couple of days later, she had a colonoscopy that revealed a mass. Not long after, she started treatments.

“I was scared to death when they told me,” DeFore said. “I thought they would say I had a hemorrhoid. I didn’t ever think about the C word. But I have peace with it.”

Good tunes

DeFore also had another six weeks packed with 28 rounds of radiation and 30 chemotherapy treatments together. She rang the bell again in July with family and staff from PCI and Hamilton Medical Center present to support her.

“It was such a special moment to me that day to know that I wasn’t alone in my journey and that people that worked at both places were there to support me during this battle in my life,” she said.

She is being monitored for the possibility of additional treatments. But she’s known already for her lifting spirits through her talent on the baby grand piano in the waiting area of PCI. DeFore often plays old-time gospel hymns on the instrument to help pass the time for herself and other patients.

“When I would do my treatments, I would play the piano, and my husband would play the mandolin,” she said. “Then I would see people there getting their treatments, and they would have a smile on their face. That made me feel good.”

They liked to play “Keep on the Firing Line” or “Amazing Grace” and other songs DeFore was used to playing at church from the age of 12. Occasionally, someone else joined in singing with her. When her daughter posted a video of her performance on Facebook, it got more than 3,000 views, she said.

DeFore recently returned to work at Mohawk Industries where she handles accounts payable. She continues to fill in for local churches as a piano player when asked.

She had high praise for her care team and the small touches that helped make the experience more bearable. At times, they would have art time where patients could draw or paint small rocks.

Lisa Duhaime, MD, and Arif Ali, MD, provided care along with a support team of nurses and other providers. Her support team also includes husband Michael, daughter Hannah, and her mother, Roxie Chastain.

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Photo: Charlise Defore