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A couple welcomes a baby on New Year's Eve during a flu lockdown.

Moving Medicine Forward One Step at a Time

I hope you enjoyed the holidays safely and have returned feeling refreshed and ready to take on a new year.

There are great things in store for our enterprise in 2021. We are moving forward with future plans, upgrades and expansions across Jacksonville that put us closer to achieving our vision of being the region's most valued health care asset. Last year, we were faced with unexpected challenges, forcing us to pivot, change processes and, in some cases, change the way we did business. However, thanks to the efforts, innovative ideas and hard work of faculty and staff, we made it through and have come out on the other side stronger than we were before.

Upgrades and renovations to the downtown campus continue. In November, we opened a new MRI suite on the first floor of the Clinical Center, featuring a 3T MRI scanner. This year, we plan to install a new digital CT scanner. Additionally, a new Office of Student Affairs for the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville will open in a renovated space in the Borland Library to help support the development of the regional medical school.

Thanks to a donation from the Avalon Fund, the UF Health Brain Wellness Center is slated to open this summer. Likewise, planning and development are underway for a new ambulatory surgery center and medical office building, targeted to open in 2022. We are also moving forward with plans to build several facilities throughout Jacksonville that will have an urgent care center and an emergency room in a single location. This is a brand-new concept for the First Coast.

While there are exciting plans ahead, it's important to recognize the great strides we've made over the last few years. We opened new facilities throughout Jacksonville in 2019 and 2020, which have done well in spite of the



pandemic. UF Health Wildlight and UF Health Family Medicine – Crystal Springs recently celebrated one-year anniversaries. UF Health Imaging Center – Baymeadows will celebrate its one-year anniversary this March, followed by UF Health Rehabilitation – Wildlight in October. I look forward to seeing these locations continue to grow over the next year.

Although 2020 is over, COVID-19 is still a major part of our everyday lives. Vaccine administration is underway, but please continue to stay safe by practicing physical distancing and wearing your masks. As always, thank you for all the work you do at UF Health Jacksonville. It's your expertise and knowledge that allow us to better serve our patients and the community.

Sincerely,

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA
CEO, UF Health Jacksonville
Dean, UF College of Medicine – Jacksonville

WE PRACTICE PRECAUTIONS HEALING ENVIRONMENT

HELP KEEP OUR CAMPUS COMMUNITY SAFER.



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Turning PAIN into PURPOSE

UF Health specialists helped patient navigate breast cancer diagnosis and treatment



Jasmine Souers remembers Dec. 30, 2016, the day she received a life-changing diagnosis — stage I breast cancer. She was 26 years old, with a thriving marketing career and was making plans for the future. The journey that followed led her somewhere she wasn't expecting, and today she uses her own experience to help others.

Searching for Answers

Months prior to her diagnosis, she noticed her left breast was swollen and painful to touch, and she found stains inside her bra. She examined her breast to determine what had caused the stain. Souers has a family history of breast cancer. To err on the side of caution, she visited an emergency room.

"We tried to replicate the discharge. After the mammogram and ultrasound results came back negative, they recommended that I visit my primary care physician," Souers said.

She visited Nikki Rowan, MD, medical director of UF Health Women's Specialists – Generation to Generation, to have Rowan examine her breast. The nipple discharge appeared bloody, not colorless, yellow or milky.

"Jasmine is very in tune with her body," Rowan said. "I moved quickly based on her concern. I wanted imaging. Still, imaging tends to miss breast cancer in young women."

Rowan referred Souers to the UF Health Breast Center – Jacksonville to see Bharti Jasra, MBBS, MD, FACS, a breast surgical oncologist. A diagnostic mammogram with tomosynthesis and a targeted ultrasound were performed, but didn't show breast abnormalities.

"Jasmine had nipple discharge from one breast. It was bloodstained per history, but we couldn't elicit on a clinical examination," Jasra said. "It's difficult to read a mammogram of a young woman due to density of the breast tissue. When a level of clinical suspicion is high, we evaluate further with a breast MRI. The MRI showed an abnormal enhancement in the left breast, and through a biopsy, we found multifocal DCIS, or ductal carcinoma in situ, breast cancer with invasive ductal carcinoma."

Making a Tough Decision

Souers and her mom, Alsebre Davis, were devastated, but she knew that her family and close friends would support her.

"It was an early stage cancer with small foci scattered over a large area of breast. Because of the size of the lesion and family history, a shared decision was made to do a mastectomy to remove the entire area," Jasra said.

On Jan. 24, 2017, Souers had a bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction surgery. She then underwent 25 rounds of proton therapy radiation at the UF Health Proton Therapy Institute.

"When diagnosed at an early stage, breast cancer has a good prognosis with treatment. Jasmine proactively sought help when she noticed symptoms and was appropriately referred by Dr. Rowan," Jasra said. "We did a further work-up with a breast MRI, even though clinical examination, mammogram and ultrasound were unremarkable. This helped with early diagnosis and breast cancer treatment. Jasmine went through the entire treatment courageously, which is truly inspiring."

Reaching Out to Help Others

Souers learned how to navigate her new normal and came to terms with a body she wasn't born with. Her case manager and nurse navigator encouraged her to join a breast cancer support group. Although breast cancer was the common thread shared by the group, their life experiences differed.

"I loved the older ladies, but I wanted to connect with younger women. My former boss referred me to a support group that included women closer to my age," Souers said.

She also wanted to engage other African American women who had a mastectomy, so she searched for online resources and marketing materials specific to African American women and women of color. However, Souers struggled to find such resources.

She attended the Young Survival Coalition Summit, a conference for young adults diagnosed with breast cancer before turning 41. It was there she met Marissa Thomas, a young breast cancer survivor. The two bonded over their experiences and desire to harness the collective power of marginalized voices, and together they started a nonprofit.

"I am the co-founder of 'For the Breast of Us.' Our mission is to uplift women of color affected by breast cancer by sharing stories that educate, inspire and connect," Souers said.

She is thankful for all who helped her navigate breast cancer and treatment, crediting Rowan and Jasra for saving her life. Souers recently celebrated turning 30 and is focused on fulfilling her purpose.

"I wouldn't wish cancer on anyone," Souers said. "I'm grateful for the experience, as it taught me about myself. My pain turned into purpose."



A couple welcomes their first baby during a flu lockdown.

Many new moms are delivering babies during the COVID-19 pandemic with only one significant person at their side due to visitation restrictions. During difficult flu seasons, there have been similar visitation restrictions to protect moms and babies. In 2019, a high number of flu cases resulted in visitor limitations in the labor and delivery units at UF Health Jacksonville and UF Health North.

Amber Bird and Keegan Swieter looked forward to delivering their first child at UF Health North. Everything seemed routine with the pregnancy. Bird enjoyed the care she received at UF Health Women's Specialists – North and was comfortable as she headed toward the birth. As her due date drew near, however, Bird started to experience complications.

On Dec. 29, 2019, Bird's labor began by induction due to her high blood pressure. A very long and difficult labor ensued, as the baby became stuck in the birth canal. There were some concerns about the umbilical cord, but her providers worked to continue a vaginal delivery and avoid a cesarean section surgery.

Kate Washburn, a certified nurse midwife, was on the team monitoring Bird's labor progress closely in case a C-section was necessary. Washburn has been delivering babies at UF Health North since it opened in 2017.

"I try to make sure patients are aware of the full clinical picture regarding their care," Washburn said. "Our goal is vaginal delivery, but not at the cost of the baby or mother's life."

At the last possible moment, the baby fortunately moved through the birth canal without the need for surgery. Parker Swieter was born on Dec. 31, 2019, after 41 hours of labor — New Year's Eve.

"We received constant guidance throughout the labor from the staff," Bird said. "The reassurance and positive attitude helped to get us through."

Now that baby Parker had arrived, Bird was anxious to share him with her family and friends. Unfortunately, no

visitors were allowed due to the high numbers of patients with the flu in the hospital.

Washburn recalled how tough it was for moms-to-be giving birth during the flu lockdown without family and friends by their side.

"It's hard to give birth in a situation where people can't visit, and when you're alone with your partner," Washburn said. "In some ways, though, it adds to the bonding between parents and their newborn baby."

Many of Bird and Swieter's family members wanted to see the baby right away, so the time in recovery was also a waiting game. Bird tried not to be discouraged, but each day was more difficult.

The nurses, midwives and physicians who cared for mom, dad and baby Parker during this time became their surrogate family as they kept the parents' spirits up through stories, pampering and even jokes to make them laugh.

Kacee Gouin, BSN, RNC-OB, was one of Bird's nurses from beginning to end.

"Being with Amber and Keegan through delivery and postpartum was an incredible bonding experience. I was blessed to be their encouragement and coaching team while their families were unable to be in the room with them," Gouin said.

Visitor restrictions were temporarily lifted and a few family members came to visit. The next day, however, one visitor tested positive for the flu. Bird and Parker were put in isolation in the labor and delivery suite as a precaution. "Being in a hospital is never an easy task, and with the flu lockdown in place, it made it a little more frustrating since I couldn't leave the room and my family couldn't be with me," Bird said.

After spending seven days in the hospital, Bird and baby Parker were finally able to go home on Jan. 4. Bird is truly grateful to all the providers at UF Health North for making the best out of an unusual situation.

Parker is now a year old, oblivious to the flu lockdown in 2019 and the current COVID-19 pandemic. He is a healthy, talkative boy, who brings joy to his parents every day.

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NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

April – Jan. 20

May – Feb. 15

June – March 15

July – April 15

Submit your copy and photos via
email to **openlines@jax.ufl.edu**.

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