KU Hospital Orthopedic Oncologist Described as ‘Miracle Worker’

Karry Britt
July 9, 2010
Well Commons

A 68-year-old Lenexa businessman got a second opinion at Kansas University Hospital on a bone cancer diagnosis. It was a decision that saved his left arm, and ultimately his life.

For two years, a pain in Harry Weatherford’s left arm progressively worsened. He had suffered a rotator cuff tear in the right arm years ago, and he figured that was the cause of his pain.

In December, he went to his doctor to get it checked out. That doctor sent him to a specialist. After tests, Weatherford received some bad news: “He took me into a room with two other doctors and he said, ‘Mr. Weatherford, I am sorry to inform you that you have cancer from your elbow to your shoulder. You have a cancerous tumor there that has totally encapsulated the inside of your bone. We need to operate right away.’”

Weatherford said, “OK, but I want a second opinion.” He was referred to Kansas University Hospital, where he was seen by Dr. Kim Templeton, an orthopedic oncologist.

Templeton ran tests, including a Thallium dye test. She is one of few doctors worldwide who uses Thallium to help detect cartilage tumors. Thallium is used in patients who have suffered heart attacks because the dye helps indicate the level of blood flow in the coronary arteries.

She estimated that KU Hospital has used Thallium dye to test about 80 patients for cartilage tumors during the past decade. The dye helps detect if there is a cartilage tumor and how aggressive it may be. She works in conjunction with Dr. Reginald Dusing, an associate professor of radiology.

“It’s just a hard tumor to pin down and diagnose,” she said. “This is just an additional test to make my patients and myself more comfortable.”

Templeton said X-rays indicated Weatherford had a cartilage tumor. But the Thallium dye determined that it wasn’t very active, and he would need a lot less surgery than his other doctor had indicated.

“It was very, very good news,” Weatherford said. “Cancer is a pretty scary thing and to have Dr. Templeton tell me, ‘You do not have cancer, but we still have to operate,’ was a godsend to me. It not only relieved me, but my family.”

Two days later, Templeton operated. She scraped out the tumor, which was later determined to be benign. Weatherford was back to work in less than a week. Templeton said Thallium also can detect cancer when it’s not showing up on X-rays. Two years ago, she treated a woman who was having severe pain in her legs. X-rays were not showing anything, but the Thallium detected the tumor, and it was confirmed through a biopsy. Templeton performed a more aggressive surgery, which saved her life.

“It’s another piece of information. It’s not something where I would rely solely on the Thallium scan,” Templeton said.

**Innovative work**
Templeton, professor of orthopedic surgery and health policy and management at KU Medical Center, is humble about her work, but it’s not the first time that she’s been featured because of her innovative procedures.

Last November, she performed a rare surgery on a 19-year-old boy who had bone cancer in his left arm. The 10-hour procedure involved amputating the cancerous limb and then saving as many nerves as possible to use with a prosthesis. The procedure had only been done 35 times worldwide, and KU was the first to perform it on a cancer patient — not a trauma patient. She said the teen is doing well. Templeton’s 33-page resume includes numerous honors and grants that she has received since she began working at KU Hospital in 1995. She is highly regarded among patients, medical students and staff. “Her efforts and innovations have lead to better lifestyles for the patients that she can treat,” said Dr. William Barkman, chief of staff. “She is an extraordinary individual, and we are lucky to have her.”

**Life-saving recommendation**
She’s also known for taking that extra step with her patients. Seven weeks after surgery, Weatherford returned to KU for a follow-up visit. His arm was healing, but he was short of breath.

Templeton was adamant that he see a cardiologist that day. He visited a KU Hospital cardiologist who ran tests. Weatherford needed heart surgery. He was surprised because his regular cardiologist said he was not a candidate for such surgery. In fact, Weatherford was told he had just two years to live, and the first one was up.

KU doctors thought differently. “They said, ‘We didn’t see an expiration date anywhere on the X-rays, so why don’t we go ahead and do it because you are going to be fine,’ ” Weatherford recalled. He had quadruple bypass surgery a few days later, and was back to work in two weeks. He wished he would have gotten a second opinion sooner.

“I see it in my wife’s face how relieved she is because they have given me quite a few more years.” he said with a smile. The couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 7 with a trip to Mexico where they renewed their vows.
“I feel like Dr. Templeton, because of her concern for me as a person, saved my life,” he said. “She’s a miracle worker as far as I am concerned.”