

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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# Women of Impact



# Tammy Barta

## Breast Cancer Survivor Feels Like Part of the Team

by Autumn Bishop, marketing and content strategist at LMH Health.  
photo courtesy LMH Health



Dr. Jennifer Hawasli, Dr. Scarlett Aldrich, Tammy Barta, Dr. Andrew Meyer and Amy Shealy, nurse navigator.

Tammy Barta walked alongside her mother when she received her breast cancer diagnosis in 1993. She had seen Matthew Stein, MD, then a physician at the LMH Health Cancer Center, and knew when her mom received the news, she better prepare herself and take all precautions now in case, one day, she got the same call.

“In my mind, it was never if I would get breast cancer but when,” Barta explains. “I had prepared myself for years about what I would do if I ever found a lump. Of course, I checked myself regularly, and on my birthday in February of 2021, when I went to bed, I noticed a knot under my breast.”

She called her doctor the morning after discovering the knot, and they sent her to have a sonogram as soon as possible at the LMH Health West Campus. While nothing had appeared on Barta’s mammogram the previous November, after this mammogram, the radiologist and technician both said it looked pretty serious.

“They had me in the next day for a biopsy, and just a couple of days later,

they called to confirm that it was cancer,” she says. “I was OK because I had it in my mind all these years. For my family, it was much tougher. After my husband had finished processing, we told our kids and the family.”

When Barta’s mom was going through cancer, she and her stepdad had cared for her. Her stepdad now lives with her and her family, and she says having someone who had walked this road before as a resource made a huge impact.

### Meeting the Teams

When it was time for treatment, Barta ended up needing chemotherapy but not radiation. She met with Jennifer Hawasli, MD, a breast surgeon with Lawrence Breast Specialists, who walked her through what was next.

“Dr. Hawasli answered all the questions I had about my surgery. She was sweet and kind and stayed positive,” Barta says. “She would affirm me that we could get this cancer out and would explain every step of the way—what I would have done, why—and it always gave me clarity knowing what was going on.”

In the coming days, she met with An-

drew Meyer, MD, an oncologist with the LMH Health Cancer Center, and Scarlett Aldrich, MD, a plastic surgeon with Plastic Surgery Specialists of Lawrence. Those experiences continued to put her at ease, her knowing she was going to receive great care.

“Dr. Meyer is the sweetest man in the whole wide world. He was always reassuring and kind. Since we caught it early enough, he assured me it was only Stage 1, but we needed to move fast,” Barta says. “I met with Dr. Aldrich about breast reconstruction, and she was amazing at explaining everything. During my visit, she looked at everything she needed to, provided some wonderful suggestions and let me make my own decision on reconstruction.”

### Time for Treatment

Barta remembers it all happening so quickly. She found the lump on Feb. 28, 2021. Her port was put in on March 25, and she began her journey through chemotherapy on April 6.

“From diagnosis to treatment, it all happened within a month. No one hesitated or missed a beat; it was boom, boom, boom, and I was ready for treatment,” she explains. “I truly



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have to give credit to my coordinator, as well. There is a lot of information that comes your way. They gave me a printout that just gave me clear answers and schedules telling me where to be at what time. It made that portion so easy.”

Barta’s team determined she would need six rounds of chemotherapy. She would receive six different infusions when she went into treatment, and since she was HER+ (which can cause more growth of cancer cells), she would need six rounds of infusions for that diagnosis, as well. She says the nurses and medical staff were always kind and checked in often to make sure she was comfortable and doing alright.

“The team would offer me blankets and snacks, and would constantly check in and ask questions to make sure I was OK. Every time they would come care for me, they would explain exactly what they were doing,” she adds. “Though I was supposed to have six chemo infusions, by mid-July 2021, I had become incredibly sick and didn’t know if I could continue with the treatments.”

Barta’s sickness led to low magnesium and potassium, and she became anemic. She needed blood transfusions, magnesium and potassium infusions, and fluids, and later became an inpatient at LMH Health because she had nephritis (inflammation in the kidneys).

“This whole time, with any complication I had, the nurses continued to treat me wonderfully and were very responsive in getting things done and talking with me about my condition,” Barta says. “After my fifth chemo treatment, Dr. Meyer decided it would not be smart to complete the sixth. This scared me. My brain would say, ‘But what if, what if.’ Dr. Meyer talked me through this and said my body needed to heal before we began the double mastectomy and reconstruction.”

Once her body had healed, she met again with Drs. Haswasi and Aldrich to discuss surgery and reconstruction. The process was again seamless, and before she knew it, it was time for the procedure.

## The Call

Barta had previously had breast-reduction surgery, so the process wasn’t completely unfamiliar. The team continued to assure her everything would be alright. After the surgery, she went home and began her recovery.

“Not too long after the surgery, I got a call from Dr. Haswasi,” Barta says. “She asked if my husband was around since he was with me every step of the way at the appointments, treatments and everything. I said yes, and she asked that I put him on speaker phone. She said she didn’t usually call, but she had to let us know some good



news. She said, 'Tammy, we got it. We got all the cancer.' At my next appointment with her, she couldn't wait to give me a big hug, and I was just overjoyed. These people were now like great friends and family to me. To hear this news was incredible."

She says her care team made her feel like she was also part of the team. There were no decisions made for Barta—they gave her all the information, made sure she felt calm and let her make the decisions that were best for her. She says she knows she made the right decision staying in Lawrence for her care.

"Years ago, I worked in IT (information technology) at LMH Health at a time where the reputation was that LMH wasn't the best place for your care," Barta explains. "It brings me so much joy to see how much has changed and how incredible the care that we offer our community is. I could not imagine having a better experience or a better care team. They made sure I was healthy, mentally and physically, and never made me seem like just another patient. I was always their No. 1 priority when I was in their care."

Barta was amazed to see that even when the team members seemed like they were running 100 miles a minute, they still checked in to talk with her and make sure she was hanging in there.

"I have nothing but wonderful things to say. Even the scars from my surgery were fantastic, I don't even see them," she says. "I am grateful to be back to work full time and doing things with my family. If I see any member of my care team out in public, I would without a doubt give them a hug. I recommend the team at LMH Health to everyone and could not imagine receiving better care anywhere else." ▲



### Spare just one hour for your breast health?

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