

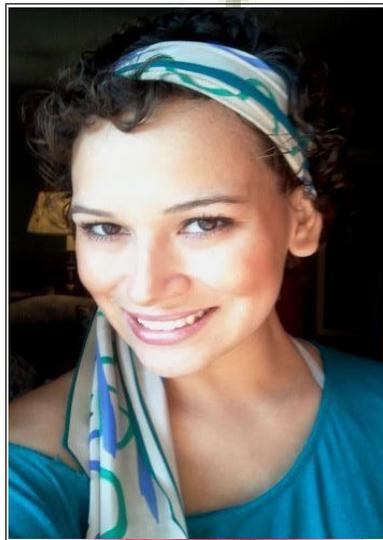


TITAN OF TEAL

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"On September 22, 2010 I was diagnosed with advanced stage III-C ovarian cancer. I was misdiagnosed for an entire year which is not unusual for ovarian cancer diagnoses, especially since I was so young. I was diagnosed with Germ cell/Epithelial mix tumors. Because my BRCA test are negative, I have no family history and I was considerably healthy before being vegetarian and highly active, I was classified as less than 2% of the population diagnosed at the age of 28 with types and stage.



I accidentally found out about cancer when I started to feel bad, with a lot of pain, feeling exhausted and tired, and drove myself to the emergency room for a check-up because my stomach had blown up so much it looked like I was pregnant, even though I knew for sure that I was not. I had been very tired for about a month, but I thought I was just working a lot.

What I did not know was that when I checked in I would not be leaving for a while. They ran tests and came and told me that there was definitely a tumor and that I would need an operation. I immediately thought I was going to die. I was scheduled for surgery for the next day. I pleaded with them to save my ovaries because I thought I might want to have children. During surgery they found out the main tumor was 17 by 14 cm and on my right ovary. They ended up removing my right ovary entirely, part of my left ovary, part of my stomach, intestines and some lymph nodes.

I nearly died on the operating table, needed to have blood transfusions during the operation because of haemorrhaging.

Immediately after surgery I had the urge to run and the main oncologist came and told me it was cancer and that I'd need chemo. I realized I had no control. For the next 10 days I just remember bits and pieces – it was so overwhelming. I started taking three types of chemo, cisplatin, etoposide, and bleomycin 10 days after surgery. They could not give my prognosis because they did not know how I would respond to the chemo. Three weeks into my chemo, I started feeling really sick, lost my hair and gained 15 pounds from the steroids. I was in physical pain, feeling nauseous, could not stand up, feeling weak, could not sleep had huge anxiety. I went through February with treatment dealing with blood counts being too low. Three weeks into treatment my tumor markers went from about 14,000 to about 1600 which showed that fortunately I was responding very well to chemo. Nothing else mattered, I was in survivor mode and fighting for my life.

On February 11, 2011, I was told that there was no evidence of disease. Because they left my uterus and part of left ovary, I have a huge chance statistically of not making it to my 5 year anniversary, fully understanding that the cancer may return. As a result of my diagnosis I have become more involved in raising cancer awareness. I volunteer my time to the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition and started my own non profit, cancerhascancer.org to help raise awareness about ovarian cancer and to offer hope and resources to others newly diagnosed. I have received a lot of support from Cancer Support Community and volunteer for them frequently. I want to be proactive about living a full, healthy and happy life.

I just celebrated my 1st year of remission, I've allowed myself a year to recover physically from the side effects. I have permanent nerve damage on my entire right side of the body and memory loss. But that hasn't stopped me from encouraging others to fight as hard as they can. I have been blessed with cancer in an odd way, it has helped me set my priorities straight and live a full life with no fears. So, I would like to return and finish my college degree, I stopped attending college in 2005 because I was awarded legal custody of two younger sisters that were teenagers then. I just filed for chapter 7 bankruptcy because I was unable to repay my medical bills having been unable to work since the day I was diagnosed. It's time to take care of myself and in order to help others I need to lead by example and help myself first."

Heather Rodriguez

President & Founder of

The Cancer Has Cancer Foundation