



# MedStar Georgetown MD

## Diagnosed with cancer during pregnancy, first-time mom beats cancer and delivers a healthy baby boy.

By Jenne Young

Ten weeks into her pregnancy, Erica Lucca Wish went for a routine prenatal blood test. The results came back extremely abnormal and pointed to the possibility of malignancy (cancer) in the mother.

Erica's geneticist referred her to the NIH study IDENTIFY. The study enrolls women with abnormal or inconclusive noninvasive prenatal screening (NIPT) results, despite follow-up tests showing no fetal abnormalities.

"After a full day at NIH, I got my results—there was an 8.1 cm mass in my chest. I was in shock. Here I thought I was in the best health of my life, and in fact, I wasn't," says Erica. She was 33, expecting her first child, and had cancer.

Erica and her husband knew they needed to find a medical team fast. "A family friend, the chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at MedStar Georgetown

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Lien James running the Athens marathon.

Photo courtesy of Lien James



Erica's strength and resilience shine through as she embraces her new role as a mother, cancer-free. Photo by Hilary Schwab

## After her knee replacement, there's no slowing Lien James down.

By Susan Walker

Lien James may have started running marathons a bit later in life, but the 73-year-old doesn't plan to slow down any time soon. She ran her first marathon at 50 in 2001, completing 136 marathons over the years, including several overseas.

In March 2022, while she was training in Utah for a half-marathon at Zion National Park, she felt her knee pop as she was walking up a

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## Request to use a fax machine leads to an offer to donate a kidney. By Susan Walker

Virginia State Police Lt. Kevin Warsinsky attributed his constant tiredness to the fast pace and long hours of his work in law enforcement. "For years, I was tired but didn't think much of it," says Kevin. "I wasn't a fan of regular doctor's appointments, but they do blood draws at work. I found out my blood work showed a decline in kidney function, down to about 24%, which was rather alarming."

Kevin made an appointment with a nephrologist near his home in Fairfax, Virginia, who worked to slow his declining kidney function. Unfortunately, his kidney disease continued to progress, with his next blood work showing his kidney function at 15%. But Kevin didn't feel ready to go on dialysis, fearing it would interfere with work and daily life.

Over the next several years, his kidney function continued to drop, bottoming out at 4%. His nephrologist told him he needed to start dialysis immediately, so he and his wife took the steps needed to start home dialysis. "It was an extremely difficult experience, not only for me, but also for my wife," Kevin says.

### Reconnecting with an old friend

Kevin had to file for disability and called state police headquarters in Fairfax to arrange to use the fax machine to submit his paperwork. An old friend and colleague, Sgt. Jonathan Zarkauskas, answered the phone, a coincidence that would change Kevin's life.

**"He asked what I needed, and I said I was probably going to need a kidney transplant. Very nonchalantly, Jon said, 'I'll give you my kidney.'"**

– Kevin Warsinsky

Kevin and Jon had worked together as canine handlers in narcotics interdiction, an intense job where they clocked a lot of hours together. But as they took on new roles in different parts of Virginia, they lost touch. Jon asked Kevin why he needed to use the fax machine, and Kevin told him he was on dialysis.



**Former partners in canine handling, Kevin (recipient; left) and Jonathan (donor; right), reunite to exchange a life-saving act of compassion.** Photo by Silver Ridge Productions

"He asked what I needed, and I said I was probably going to need a kidney transplant," Kevin says. "Very nonchalantly, Jon said, 'I'll give you my kidney.' I was stunned. It's such a tremendous gift. He knew I needed help, and he was there for me."

Kevin's nephrologist referred him to MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute to be evaluated for a transplant. Jon also went through the donor evaluation process at MedStar Georgetown. "I didn't know anything about the transplant process," says Jon, "but the whole thing went very smoothly. Every question I had was answered. I knew I was in good hands."

Although Jon was not a match for Kevin, they participated in a paired kidney exchange, with Jon's kidney going to another person in need and Kevin receiving a kidney from a different donor. "I would have done anything to make sure Kevin got the transplant he needed," adds Jon. "When the doctors at MedStar Georgetown explained the paired donation program, I didn't hesitate."

"It was amazing that Kevin's friend came forward to donate for him," says Jennifer Verbese, MD, Living Donor Kidney Transplant Program surgical director. "We have so many innovative local and national programs that make it possible for qualified donors to give a kidney to their loved one, family member, friend, or acquaintance. We even have people donate without a specific recipient in mind. If a donor

and recipient are not a compatible pair, we can put them into a swap or exchange so after they donate, their recipient still gets a very high-quality living donor organ."

Kevin and Jon were home in just a few days after surgery and back to work in a few months. Every May 1, the date of Kevin's transplant, their wives and they get together to celebrate.

**"The people at MedStar Georgetown have this community of care where you are immediately embraced."**

– Jon Zarkauskas

"It's a celebration of life for me," says Kevin. "It's like being reborn. It's been six years and I feel great. I've told several people who also need kidney transplants that MedStar Georgetown is the only place to go."

Adds Jon, "The people at MedStar Georgetown have this community of care where you are immediately embraced. It's a phenomenal hospital. If I had another kidney, I'd be happy to be a donor again."

Give the gift of life. Be a living kidney donor. Learn more about living donation at [MedStarHealth.org/LivingDonorKidney](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/LivingDonorKidney) or call **202-444-3700**.

# MedStar Health Kids Mobile Medical Clinic celebrates a \$1.1 million philanthropic investment from Monumental Sports & Entertainment.

More than three decades of service to children and adolescents in Washington, D.C.'s Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 will continue for the next five years thanks to a generous donation.

MedStar Health and Monumental Sports & Entertainment (MSE) are proud to introduce their collaboration on the Kids Mobile Medical Clinic, which includes a newly designed version of the well-known and well-loved pediatric health center on wheels that now showcases MSE's sports team logos. Since 1992, the Kids Mobile Medical Clinic—which is run through the Division of Community Pediatrics at MedStar Health—has provided high-quality, convenient, and affordable primary care to thousands of children and adolescents across D.C.'s Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8.

**"The Kids Mobile Medical Clinic brings high-quality, holistic, caring health care directly into neighborhoods where families live."**

— Janine Rethy, MD, MPH

In the past four years alone, the clinic has seen more than 3,500 individual patients in more than 7,000 visits and provided more than 1,600 screenings for social determinants of health including food insecurity, housing, education, income, community safety, and more.

Children are seen regardless of their insurance status, and families are never billed for care. The clinic routinely provides communities with well child visits, vision and hearing screenings, lab testing, sick visits, immunizations, mental health and social needs screenings, integrated mental health and care coordination team visits, and community resource and specialist referrals.

"The Kids Mobile Medical Clinic brings high-quality, holistic, caring health care directly into neighborhoods where families live," says Janine Rethy, MD, MPH, division chief of Community Pediatrics at MedStar Health.

Enhancements to the mobile clinic were made possible through a very generous donation from Monumental Sports & Entertainment, with additional annual contributions over five years to fund clinic operations. MedStar Health recognizes the impact of this tremendous donation, which ensures the continuation of the clinic's critically important care services and strengthens MedStar Health's efforts to improve healthcare access in the District.

"Over the next several years, this investment will enable thousands of District children and their families to receive medical care and social support in order to live healthy and productive lives," shared Monumental Sports & Entertainment founder and CEO Ted Leonsis. "Giving back to the community of fans who support our teams and athletes is a priority for all of us at MSE, and I'm proud to further the work of this incredible program from the excellent team of care providers at MedStar Health."

"We are truly grateful to Monumental Sports & Entertainment for this generous gift that will help keep the Kids Mobile Medical Clinic running for the families that have depended on its services for over 30 years," says Kenneth A. Samet, FACHE, President and CEO of MedStar Health. "This is a partnership committed to making equitable, world-class health care available to everyone in the District. Together, we will continue to improve lives and uplift our communities."

The clinic's integrated health team, including the family services worker, the clinical social worker, and the wellbeing coordinator, will continue to provide team-based visits alongside pediatricians and families to deliver direct services while connecting families to critical programs and services so they can be healthy and thrive.

The Kids Mobile Medical Clinic is just one example of many public health collaborations between MedStar Health and Monumental Sports & Entertainment in recent years. Since 2019, Monumental has donated more than \$6 million to MedStar Health.



**The Kids Mobile Medical Clinic rolls forward, bringing health and hope to D.C.'s children.**

Photo by Craig Hunter Ross

To learn more about how your support can make a significant difference, visit [MedStarHealth.org/Support](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Support) or call **202-444-0721**.

# 1.7 million American adults develop sepsis each year. Knowing the signs and symptoms and taking fast action could save your life.

By Kerri Layman, MD, Chief, Emergency Medicine, MedStar Georgetown University Hospital

## Know the signs and symptoms of SEPSIS

# S E P S I S

**S**  
Shivering, fever, or very cold



**E**  
Extreme pain or discomfort



**P**  
Pale, discolored, clammy, or sweaty skin



**S**  
Sleepiness, confusion, or disorientation



**I**  
"I feel like I might die"



**S**  
Shortness of breath



**Understanding and recognizing the signs and symptoms of sepsis could help save your life or the life of a loved one.**

Sepsis, a life-threatening medical emergency, is the body's extreme response to an infection. Time matters when seeking treatment. Without treatment, sepsis can quickly cause severe damage to your internal organs and even lead to death.

Despite this threat, new national survey data released by MedStar Health shows that 81% of Americans do not know all of the signs and symptoms of sepsis, which takes a life every two minutes in the U.S. Knowing the signs and symptoms and getting immediate medical attention could save your life or the life of someone you love.

### Sepsis can be complex to detect

Sepsis is a sneaky disease. Any infection can lead to sepsis, and anyone can develop sepsis. The risk increases for:

- Infants and the elderly
- People with chronic illnesses
- Those who recently had surgery or were hospitalized
- Those with a weakened or impaired immune system

### How you know if you have an infection

Typical signs include feeling unwell; fever or drastic temperature change; pain, redness, discharge, swelling, or heat near a wound or surgical site; flu-like symptoms like sore throat, vomiting, and diarrhea; and new, intense pain anywhere in the body.

"Sepsis happens when an infection you already have triggers a chain reaction of extreme responses throughout the body, potentially leading to tissue damage, organ failure, and death," says Sharon O'Brien, MD, FCCP, chief Quality and Patient Safety officer at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. "Early recognition of the warning signs and symptoms of sepsis can literally make the difference between life and death."

By recognizing these signs and symptoms and taking immediate action, you can save a life. Seek medical care immediately and ask your healthcare provider: "Could this be sepsis?"

### Get ahead of sepsis

Sepsis can progress rapidly, and the initial infection can advance to include organ dysfunction and shock. There are four ways to get ahead of sepsis:

1. Practice good hygiene, washing hands often and ensuring wounds are covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
2. Take care to manage chronic conditions and get recommended vaccines to prevent infections and lower sepsis risk.
3. Know the signs and symptoms of sepsis.
4. Act fast! Sepsis is always a medical emergency.

By staying informed and proactive, you can make a significant difference in your health and wellbeing. Remember, knowledge and swift action are your best allies against sepsis.



**Kerri Layman, MD**



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Sepsis](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Sepsis) to learn more about what you can do to get ahead of sepsis.

# Cutting-edge neurosurgical tool brings peace of mind during brain surgery.

By Emily Marrs

When Mark Strand was diagnosed with a brain tumor in October 2023, his world narrowed to one urgent focus: finding a medical team that he had confidence in.

"It's incredibly frightening to hear you have a brain tumor," says Mark, retired after a 40-year career as a staffer and head of the Congressional Institute on Capitol Hill. "My first thought was, if I have to go through treatment for something like this, I want to make sure I'm working with the best doctors at the best possible facility."

Mark knew something was wrong after several weeks of unexplained fevers, dizziness, and double vision. That's when he turned to a multidisciplinary team of medical providers at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital for an explanation of his worrisome symptoms.

**"When you have a skilled team of medical providers using state-of-the-art technology like I had at MedStar Georgetown, it gives you confidence knowing you're going to be in good hands."**

– Mark Strand

Blood tests indicated that Mark had myeloma, a type of blood cancer that likely caused his recent fevers. A subsequent PET scan revealed an incidental finding: a benign meningioma—a tumor that can occur anywhere in the central nervous system and grows in the layers of tissue covering the brain and spinal cord. As Mark began long-term treatment for the blood cancer at MedStar Georgetown, he sought a surgeon to remove the tumor.

With no time to lose, Mark scheduled an appointment with Christopher Kalhorn, MD, neurosurgeon at MedStar Georgetown, to discuss his treatment options. Having undergone a previous



**With matching smiles, Mark and his dog enjoy the beautiful day.** Photo by Hilary Schwab

surgery with Dr. Kalhorn in 2005 to repair a ruptured disc in his back, Mark knew right away that he wanted Dr. Kalhorn to perform the operation.

"Dr. Kalhorn is an incredible physician who always has the pulse on the newest treatments and technologies," Mark says. "I had a lot of confidence in him after that first procedure."

Based on the location of Mark's tumor on the top of his head, Dr. Kalhorn recommended a craniotomy—a procedure where a temporary opening is made in the skull to access the covering of the brain—utilizing the state-of-the-art intraoperative MRI system (IMRIS) suite now open at the Verstandig Pavilion at MedStar Georgetown.

The first of its kind in the region, the IMRIS suite provides real-time imaging without transferring surgery patients out of the operating room, so neurosurgeons can precisely remove brain tumors, accurately place electrodes during deep brain stimulation surgeries, minimize risk,

and reduce the need for post-op imaging and additional surgeries.

"I knew the IMRIS suite would give us the measure of assurance and comfort during the course of Mark's surgery that we had completely removed his tumor," says Dr. Kalhorn. "Before the IMRIS technology, patients would have imaging scans after surgery, rather than during. If those scans showed residual tumor, additional surgeries would often be required.

"That's one of the major advantages of this technology," Dr. Kalhorn continues. "Every time we can avoid a trip back to the operating room, we're making neurosurgery safer for patients."

Supported by Dr. Kalhorn's expertise and the IMRIS technology, Mark underwent a successful craniotomy in March 2024. By June, he was vacationing in Tuscany with his wife.

Feeling strong, Mark is relieved that all the symptoms caused by the benign meningioma disappeared after surgery.

"No one wants to have their brain operated on, because, by definition, it's just scary," Mark says. "But when you have a skilled team of medical providers using state-of-the-art technology like I had at MedStar Georgetown, it gives you confidence knowing you're going to be in good hands."

Besides working with an exceptional team employing the most advanced technology available, Mark offers an additional piece of advice to those facing similar challenges: "Never let your neurosurgeon cut your hair," he jokes.

For more information, or to schedule an appointment with one of our specialists, visit [MedStarHealth.org/IMRIS](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/IMRIS) or call **202-444-4972**.

**Meet Christopher Kalhorn, MD**



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Kalhorn](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Kalhorn) to learn more about Dr. Kalhorn.

## Diagnosed with cancer during pregnancy, first-time mom beats cancer and delivers a healthy baby boy. continued from page 1



**Erica cradles her healthy newborn son in the hospital two weeks after her final chemotherapy infusion.** Photo by Jordan Wish

University Hospital, Helain Landy, MD, recommended MedStar Georgetown for the biopsy and treatment because she knew they had lymphoma experts," says Erica.

**"Dr. Roswarski spent nearly two hours with us. I appreciate how he took care to answer every scary and emotional question."**

– Erica Lucca Wish

MedStar Georgetown is part of the MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute. Our research engine, Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, is the only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center in the Washington, D.C., region providing access to the latest cancer treatment and breakthrough therapies.

The biopsy confirmed Erica had aggressive non-Hodgkin lymphoma. She and her husband met with Joseph Roswarski, MD, a medical hematologist oncologist specializing in lymphoma at MedStar Georgetown. They arrived at the appointment with 10 pages of questions.

"Dr. Roswarski spent nearly two hours with us. I appreciate how he took care to answer every scary and emotional question," says Erica.

"The first thing I let Erica know was that her form of cancer was a highly curable disease. However, because it was aggressive, we did not recommend she wait until after the baby was born to treat it. In general, treating lymphoma during pregnancy does not pose risks to the baby."

After exploring several treatment options, Erica's care team decided the best approach would be to treat her cancer with R-CHOP, a combination of chemotherapy and a targeted therapy (a combination known as chemoimmunotherapy). It's a first-line treatment for aggressive non-Hodgkin lymphoma. She had six treatments, a 5- to 8-hour infusion every three weeks.

"I was terrified to start treatment and worried about the baby, but the nurses and staff at the infusion clinic at MedStar Georgetown were amazing," says Erica.

Erica's prenatal appointments were with Daphnie Drassinower, MD, a maternal and fetal medicine specialist at MedStar Georgetown. They met after every chemo infusion and reviewed her sonograms. "I can't stress enough the importance of having a multidisciplinary team—especially in a situation like Erica's," says Dr. Roswarski. "Dr. Drassinower and I were in close communication throughout the treatment process."

On the morning of May 13, two weeks after Erica's final infusion, her son was born. "The baby is beautiful, healthy, and growing—it is like a miracle to me. It has been quite a journey, and I am grateful to the doctors who were with me every step of the way. Dr. Roswarski even came to meet the baby—that meant so much," says Erica.

After the baby was born, Erica had a full PET scan, and there was no sign of the cancer. She is in remission and feeling optimistic.

"If I weren't pregnant, I wouldn't have known about the cancer. This baby helped save my life." Fittingly, Erica and her husband picked a name for their son that means "protector."

For more information, or to schedule an appointment with one of our specialists, visit [MedStarHealth.org/HemOnc](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/HemOnc) or call **202-444-2223**.



**Meet Joseph Lee Roswarski, MD**



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/RoswarskiVideo](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/RoswarskiVideo) to learn more about Dr. Roswarski.



**Lien proves her love for life—and running—is stronger than ever, finishing yet another marathon at age 72.** Photo courtesy of Lien James

flight of stairs. After the pop, she couldn't bear weight on the knee or walk. Eager to find relief and resume her training, she made an appointment with Kevin Park, MD, an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in knee and hip replacement at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. MedStar Georgetown is part of the MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, with 47 orthopaedic surgery specialists at 20 locations throughout Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.

**Lien came home the day after surgery and walked up and down the block with walking sticks, feeling great.**

"X-rays showed that Ms. James had severe arthritis in both knees," says Dr. Park. "With both knees hurting, she was having trouble doing normal activities and running, which was very important to her. The first treatments I provided were cortisone injections in both knees and oral medications. I told her that if she was comfortable in a few weeks, she could run the Zion half-marathon."

"The injections worked very well," says Lien. "I was able to complete not one, but three more marathons."

Unfortunately, after she completed the New York City Marathon in 2023, Lien's knee pain became unbearable as her arthritis progressed. "My quality of life was so poor," she remembers. "I could hardly walk up the steps and couldn't carry anything, even a bag of groceries. It just wasn't how I wanted to be living."

She talked with Dr. Park about knee replacement surgery, explaining she wanted a new knee and a life without pain. He recommended a Mako SmartRobotics™ replacement, a minimally invasive approach that uses the latest technology to achieve the best possible outcomes.

"My experience with everyone at MedStar Georgetown was outstanding," Lien says. "From the front desk to the nurses and doctors, everyone was efficient and made the process as easy as possible."

Lien's surgery was a resounding success. She came home the day after surgery and walked up and down the block with walking sticks, feeling great. Working with a physical therapist, she built up her strength and endurance, walking two or three times a day, and started running again a month after surgery.

Just nine weeks after the operation, she completed the downhill Mt. Charleston half-marathon in Nevada with her new knee. "I was so happy! I had absolutely no problems and no pain throughout the race," she adds, noting that having a very active lifestyle before surgery helped her recover quickly.

Lien has resumed the active life that she loves. She runs three times a week, walks and swims every day, and can carry several bags of groceries at a time. She has several half-marathons scheduled for this year, in addition to local weekend 5K races. She is working up to her first post-surgery full marathon sometime soon.

"This has been a life-changing experience," Lien says. "It was so easy and almost painless. If you need a knee replacement, don't wait! I'm looking forward to having my other knee replaced when the time comes. I'm very grateful to everyone at MedStar Georgetown."

### **Welcome Brett Levine, MD**

Dr. Levine is an experienced orthopaedic surgeon specializing in hip and knee replacement. With nearly two decades of experience, he treats patients with the full range of hip and knee conditions, from the simple to the most complex. Visit [MedStarHealth.org/BrettLevine](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/BrettLevine) to learn more.



Visit [MedStarOrthopaedicInstitute.org](https://www.MedStarOrthopaedicInstitute.org) for a complete listing of physicians and locations. For more information, or to make an appointment with one of our orthopaedic specialists, visit [MedStarHealth.org/MGUOrtho](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/MGUOrtho) or call **202-444-8766**.



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# MedStar GeorgetownMD

A MedStar Georgetown  
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## MedStar Georgetown University Hospital named among region's best hospitals.

MedStar Georgetown University Hospital has been nationally ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the region's best hospitals for 2024-2025. It has also been ranked in the top 50 nationally for our Ear, Nose, and Throat specialty program. Both regional and national rankings recognize the outstanding clinical excellence provided by MedStar Georgetown.

*U.S. News & World Report* has also recognized MedStar Georgetown as "high performing" in the following five specialty services and for the following seven conditions and procedures.

### Specialty services:

- Cancer
- Gastroenterology and GI surgery
- Geriatrics
- Orthopaedics
- Urology

### Conditions and procedures:

- Colon cancer surgery
- Heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma
- Lung cancer surgery
- Pneumonia
- Prostate cancer surgery



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