

# “Health is Wealth”: Patti’s Cancer Survivor Story

Retired NYPD officer Patti M. discusses her experience as a 12-year survivor of cervical cancer

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“My message to women is that we put ourselves to the side most of the time, and we need to adopt a mindset that ensures that we are making ourselves a priority.”

—Patti M., Cervical Cancer Survivor

Age at diagnosis: 48

I am a retired New York City police officer and reside in New York City with my husband of 22 years. I am also a 12-year cervical cancer survivor.

Three months before my retirement I started bleeding between menstrual cycles. I accredited it to being stressed since I was getting ready to wrap up a 20-year career. At the time, I had not seen a gynecologist in 3 years. Why? Well, my gynecologist had retired, and I didn’t look for a new one. I didn’t feel the dire need to find one since I felt fine. I had no symptoms whatsoever. I had been married for 10 years and I was in a monogamous relationship. However, the progressive bleeding, fatigue, and bloating pushed me to go see a doctor.

I went to a new gynecologist, where she took a biopsy, which came back inconclusive. She told me she needed to refer me to a gynecologic oncologist. When I went to the oncologist, he took another biopsy and those results revealed I had cervical cancer, stage IIB.

My doctor decided to treat me with a combination of radiation, chemotherapy, and brachytherapy (internal radiation). The journey was tough. At times I wanted to give up, but my husband and family kept me going. I consider myself one of the lucky ones because after treatments, my tumor

disappeared and there weren't any visible cancerous cells. After 9 months, I was cancer-free.

## **Treatment Ends, but the Journey Continues**

Even though my cancer was gone, it changed my life completely. Most people think that when you're told that you are cancer-free, you can go on and pick up where you left off. That is certainly not the case at all. I had a hard time finding my old self and I became depressed.

I started using food as a way to comfort myself, and after awhile, I was diagnosed with obesity, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. I took five medications to control my illnesses, but it wasn't completely successful. My doctor told me that the next step was to start injecting insulin. This kind of turned on the light for me—I was forced to reevaluate my lifestyle.

I was able to lose 113 pounds in 14 months with healthy eating, portion control, and exercise. I was able to get these illnesses under control, and today I don't take any medication. I am now a certified wellness coach, certified personal trainer, and a group fitness instructor specializing in different modalities, including cancer recovery fitness.

## **“Health Is Wealth”**

My diagnosis has made me a passionate cervical cancer advocate, especially for Latinas, who have a higher risk for it. Cervical cancer can be prevented. We have the tools to do this: screening, education, and vaccination.

My message to women is that we put ourselves to the side most of the time, and we need to adopt a mindset that ensures that we are making ourselves a priority. Health is a big priority for me now because without it, not a lot of things matter—like being able to help my loved ones. With this mindset, we can close the door to so many illnesses. We all have to take care of ourselves because health is wealth.

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*Editor's note: January is Cervical Cancer Month. Read more [Cancer Health articles about cervical cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment](#).*