

Sharp Eyes and Fast Action Save a Life

When Maureen began complaining of knee pain, her parents initially dismissed it as a sports injury. The McLean teenager is a passionate athlete who “played every sport under the sun” growing up, and was the only freshman to make it onto the Langley High School varsity volleyball team. Despite visits to the pediatrician and chiropractor, however, Maureen’s pain persisted.

It took the practiced eye of Langley associate athletic trainer Kara Chiocchio to notice she had also developed a limp. Kara and athletic trainer Nate Welever asked Commonwealth surgeon George Aguiar, MD, who is Langley’s team physician, to take a look. “I felt a hard bony prominence along the side of her right knee,” Dr. Aguiar says. “So I had her come into the office right away for an x-ray and referred her for an MRI.” Less than 48 hours later, he delivered the devastating diagnosis to her parents: Maureen had cancer.

The tumor was a chondroblastic osteosarcoma, an extremely aggressive form of bone cancer that can develop during the period of rapid growth that occurs in adolescence, as a teenager matures into an adult. Symptoms include pain, limping, possible bone fracture, and tenderness, swelling

or redness at the tumor site. The condition is rare; Commonwealth physicians typically see just one case per year.

“Most of the young athletes who come to my office have the usual sprains and strains that resolve with simple treatment,” Dr. Aguiar says. “But if there is unexplained pain that persists or worsens despite rest and therapy, this is a red flag. From my experience, 8-12 weeks is a good threshold. If it’s not improving after that, have an imaging study to help with the diagnosis.”



Maureen, #15, celebrates with her Saxton volleyball teammates after a great play!

Dr. Aguiar sent Maureen to an orthopaedic oncologist, who removed five inches of her right femur and replaced it with titanium. She endured months of grueling chemotherapy and difficult rehabilitation, which she embraced with her characteristic determination, strength and positive attitude. “All Maureen wanted to do was get back on that volleyball court,” says her mother, Carol. “Nothing was going to stop her.”

In June, exactly nine months after Dr. Aguiar’s diagnosis, Maureen received the news everyone was hoping to hear: her cancer was gone. With a clean bill of health, she’s once again playing her heart out for her beloved Langley Saxons.

Carol credits the expertise and diligence of the school’s athletic trainers for sensing a problem and calling in Dr. Aguiar. “As parents who have never needed it before, we feel so blessed to have this kind of resource,” she says. “Maureen’s cancer diagnosis rocked our world, but Dr. Aguiar and the athletic trainers have been so positive and supportive throughout the entire process. They’ve shown nothing but encouragement about our daughter’s recovery and what she can do. Without question, they saved Maureen’s life.”



George Aguiar, MD, graduated with a BS in Biology from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and then continued his education at the Georgetown University School of Medicine where he earned his medical degree and completed his surgical internship and orthopaedic residency.

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