



## Medical Hero in the Spotlight

# Clinical trials inspire hope in Rosa's battle for life

**R**osa Small knew that something was wrong.

She had always performed regular breast self-examinations and had never noticed anything unusual until one day, at age 62, she felt a lump in her right breast. "My only symptom on self-exam was the lump, and it was not sore," says Rosa. At that point, Rosa could not have predicted that she would soon put her faith in clinical trials to help prolong her life.

Disturbed about her finding, Rosa went to her primary care physician, who confirmed the lump. Rosa immediately went to a radiologist, a surgeon, and an oncologist, who confirmed her worst fears. Rosa was diagnosed with invasive adenocarcinoma of the breast, which is a malignant tumor that spreads beyond where it initially developed and invades healthy tissue. "I have Triple Negative Breast cancer," says Rosa. That type of breast cancer is considered more aggressive and less responsive to standard treatment.

Up until then, Rosa's life in Durham, NC, was happy and active in the town where she lived with William, her husband of 49 years. She had retired from the Durham Public Schools as a media coordinator, and now had a satisfying job as an events manager. Learning she had cancer threw Rosa's cheery existence into a tailspin. "I felt as if my life was almost over, and I desperately wanted to live," says Rosa.

As Rosa struggled with her illness, her oncologist suggested a new treatment that he thought might be promising. The treatment was part of a clinical research study. Rosa was determined to keep fighting, so she learned more about the study, and went through the informed consent process.

### Willing to take the risks

She knew that there might be risks involved with taking part in a clinical trial; but she also knew it might be her best bet. "Cancer is scary and it makes you humble," says Rosa. "I had heard about people who had been in trials and they had gotten worse. However, I spoke with another person who had been in clinical trials

and she was very positive. I was somewhat apprehensive, but I had faith that things would work out."

The trial took place at the Morris Cancer Clinic at Duke University in Durham, NC. The treatment being tested was not yet available on the market. Rosa was one of 100 participants with a similar condition.

Rosa participated in a number of trials, each lasting from 2 weeks to 5 months. "The first clinical trial lasted 5 months until I had some side effects that caused me to stop the study," says Rosa.

Taking part in clinical trials helped Rosa feel that she had some control over her disease. "I also had more treatment options than the standard treatments."

In addition to getting the best possible care, Rosa also appreciated the warm and solicitous treatment from the clinical site staff and researchers. "The most positive part of the trial was the amount of attention that you get in a study," says Rosa. "The people conducting the trials were very much involved with my care and were willing to speak to me at any time."

While Rosa's most recent clinical trial has ended, she plans to enter another clinical trial when her oncologist suggests one. "I still have metastatic breast cancer, and the tumors have moved to my lungs," says Rosa.

Yet the positive spirit that has bolstered Rosa through a happy, industrious life is still burning fiercely. "I am optimistic about my future, and I feel that I will be managed for many years," says Rosa.

"I would ask anyone to take part in research trials, as it can help you and possibly future generations," says Rosa. For her and thousands of other clinical trial participants, the lifesaving developments that can come from clinical trials keep them hopeful and looking toward the future.

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