

# Winning the Battle

BY BRITTANY NAY



Dr. David Caplin consults with Gateway to Hope patient.

WHEN THE WIFE OF one of Dr. David Caplin's patients sought treatment for breast cancer, it already was too late. The young mom was the family breadwinner, but she delayed the medical help she knew her family couldn't afford. Years later, the tumor spread to the point that it was incurable, and she lost her battle. "The family lost its sole source of support: no mother, no wife, no source of income," Caplin recalls.

That's when the longtime St. Louis plastic surgeon decided to start Gateway to Hope. Caplin, along with another local surgeon, Dr. Marlys Schuh, and multiple area physicians' groups, began providing uninsured and underinsured patients with free breast-cancer care, completing mammograms, mastectomies and reconstruction

surgeries. "There are so many women in need, who, if we don't help them, have nowhere to turn," Caplin notes.

Most of the organization's patients earn too much money to receive Medicaid, but not enough to afford the comprehensive breast cancer care that Gateway to Hope provides. "Treatment for breast cancer can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Even if they have some insurance, just the co-pays and deductibles will bankrupt them," Caplin explains.

Due to an increasing need, the organization's role has expanded through the years to also provide funds for patients' insurance, food, medication, transportation, and rent or mortgages. "As the financial burden gets worse, it puts more of an emotional stress on patients and their families," Caplin notes. So the nonprofit also offers family programs, such as those that help fund birthday and Christmas gifts for kids, and food

and veterinarian bills for pets. "Virtually anything breast-cancer patients are going through, we have a program to help them," he says.

Since its 2005 inception, Gateway to Hope has helped 600-plus patients. Today, the nonprofit is unique in its role of partnering with a large network of providers to offer comprehensive breast-cancer care, from screenings to diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care. Genetic screenings—to find if patients have the high-risk gene for breast cancer—also are offered. "For those high-risk patients, we can provide [preventive] surgery and reconstruction," Caplin explains.

A diagnosis of breast cancer is devastating, Caplin notes. "It has a ripple effect. It's significant not only for the patients, but for their spouse, kids, parents and co-workers. But we have very skilled nurses who help patients navigate that complex journey. And they make sure nobody falls through the cracks."

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