

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Local woman first patient to receive Theralink test

Proteomic analysis maps exact treatment needed for cancer care

By Jack Bulavsky
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Imagine a magical, yet simple test in the cancer realm that maps out the exact treatment needed for care. That dream is becoming a reality, and the first patient in the world to receive such a test lives in Las Vegas.

The test is called Theralink, and the patient is Anicko Vallejo, a 29-year-old stage 1 breast cancer patient at Comprehensive Cancer Centers of Nevada. She will be the first person to receive the test and have her treatment path navigated by Theralink.

"Theralink enables physicians to make personalized treatment recommendations for cancer patients by analyzing the proteins in the cancer cells," said Matthew Schwartz, a board-certified radiation oncologist with Comprehensive Cancer Centers of Nevada.

"This type of molecular profiling is the next step in precision oncology in finding the right treatment for the right patient at the right time. It's the future of medicine," he said. "Doctors will be able to map out the tumor using Theralink proteomic (protein) analysis to figure out what the right treatment will be in advance, such as chemotherapy, immunotherapy or some other procedure."

The technology was invented about a decade ago at the National Institutes of Health and George Mason University.

"I first learned about it a year and a half ago," Schwartz said. He was introduced to Theralink through John Brugmann, founder of the molecular profiling company that specializes in biomarker assay services, and Dr. Rajesh C. Shrotriya. Both live in Henderson.

"It was so cutting edge and new and I really didn't know much about it," Schwartz said. "After speaking



Anicko Vallejo, shown with husband Steven and children Landon, Amelia and Adrian, has stage 1 breast cancer. She will be the first patient to receive the Theralink test, which maps out the treatment needed for care.

to multiple world-renowned oncologists such as Dr. Joyce O'Shaughnessy, Dr. Brian Leyland-Jones and Dr. Daniel Von Hoff, I realized how important this technology is and got excited about bringing it to the clinic to help our patients."

Theralink is the first application of protein-based molecular analysis for breast cancer patients in the clinic. Because it was started here and because multiple Comprehensive Cancer Centers oncologists are part of it, Nevada was chosen for the



Dr. Matthew Schwartz

Theralink assay.

"It's not often that a patient in Las Vegas gets a chance to be the first in the world to receive a groundbreaking new test or treatment," Schwartz said.

Vallejo was born in the Philippines, raised in Orange County, California, and has resided in Las Vegas since 2015. Her husband, Steven, serves in the military and they have three children: Adrian, 9, Landon, 6, and Amelia who turns 2 in November.

She sought help when she felt a lump under her armpit. Both sides of her family have a history with breast cancer: Her mother and grandmother both carried the BRCA2 gene.

After confirming cancer in her left breast, Vallejo was advised to have a bilateral mastectomy. Two weeks after her operation, she learned that the cancerous cells had spread to her chest. Recently, she found out that she needs to complete chemotherapy as a next step.

According to Schwartz, Theralink is starting with breast cancer now but will be offered for all cancer types in the near future.

"This is a game changer because it will help doctors figure out the right treatment in advance," he said. "This could save thousands of patients' lives, prevent unnecessary side effects and not waste time on treatments that don't work."

"Not only that, I think it's awesome that Anicko, Comprehensive Cancer and Las Vegas were chosen to be the first. We need more good news given everything that is going on. It shows how patients in Las Vegas have access to cutting-edge treatments and testing. A lot of people don't know that Comprehensive Cancer Center of Nevada has been part of the development of over 100 FDA-approved cancer therapies, and we have over 176 clinical research studies annually."

Vallejo is looking forward to the testing that will show her what future treatment she may or may not need. She just doesn't want to have any relapse.

"I'm an office manager for a landscaping company and will be working half the time in the office and half the time at home once my chemo starts," she said. "I'm trying to live a normal life for me and my family, but it's been emotionally difficult with my cancer along with the pandemic and all the unrest in the country."

"If I think of myself as a cancer patient, it's not going to help me. I have been in contact with other women via Facebook groups who have survived and currently fighting breast cancer. They come from diverse backgrounds and situations. If I have a day of self-pity, I get through it and feel better the next day."

[Click Here for News Video of First Breast Cancer Patient Using Theralink](#)