

A determined patient teams up with highly skilled care team at Mount Sinai South Nassau to fight stage IIA breast cancer

By Mount Sinai South Nassau

Nothing could stop Angela Santopolo, 33, of Rockaway Beach, Queens, from teaching or earning her master's degree in education — on time. Not even breast cancer.

On July 22, 2022, Santopolo, a fourth-grade teacher, was diagnosed with stage IIA cancer in her right breast following a routine visit with her gynecologist and her first mammogram. Her doctor gave her a listing of breast cancer physicians she could follow up with who accepted her insurance, and she chose Dhvani Thakker, MD, Director of Women's Medical Oncology at Mount Sinai South Nassau.

They met a few days later and set up a treatment plan tailored to Santopolo's ambitious goals. The plan included genetic testing to evaluate for any underlying genetic mutation, cryopreservation of her eggs to preserve her ability to conceive, eight rounds of chemotherapy from September through January 2023, and surgery in February. Santopolo opted

for a double mastectomy followed by reconstructive surgery.

Christine Hodyl, DO, Mount Sinai South Nassau's Director of Breast Health Services, performed the mastectomies, which also included initial breast reconstruction with the insertion of temporary tissue expanders performed by plastic surgeon Anke Ott Young, MD. Santopolo visited Dr. Ott to have the expanders filled with saline every two weeks in preparation for more reconstructive surgery. On August 24, Dr. Ott replaced the expanders with permanent breast implants.

Aside from absences for chemotherapy sessions and a six-week leave of absence following the mastectomy, Santopolo continued teaching and earned her master's degree in May as planned.

"I am blessed to have Dr. Thakker as my oncologist," says Santopolo. "Even though it is a small thing, she will sit there and listen. She said to me, 'How can you have

cancer, go to work and grad school?' She calls me her superstar."

Dr. Hodyl, like all Mount Sinai South Nassau's breast surgeons, uses many different surgical techniques to treat breast cancer. Breast-conserving surgery includes advanced techniques to preserve healthy breast. If a mastectomy is needed, there are many options for breast reconstruction. The surgery is chosen and tailored for each individual patient. Mount Sinai South Nassau's cancer program is accredited by the Commission on Cancer and National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers. The Mount Sinai South Nassau cancer team offers expert cancer care, close to home, so patients don't have to travel into New York City for treatment.

To schedule a consultation or for more information about Mount Sinai South Nassau Breast Health, call 516-632-3350, or visit mountsinai.org/southnassau.



Angela Santopolo was successfully treated for stage IIA breast cancer by the team at Mount Sinai South Nassau, enabling her to continue teaching fourth grade and complete her master's degree in education.