

# I CAN

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FEATURE ARTICLE

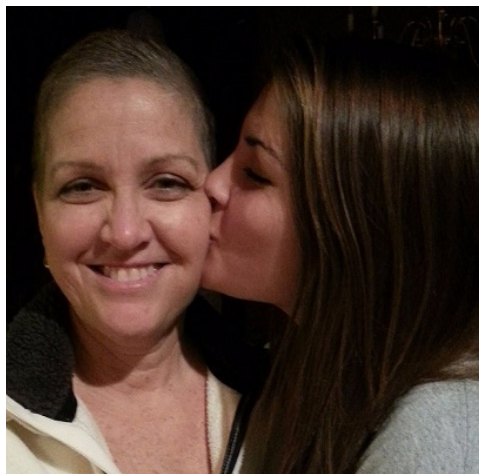
## THRIVING THROUGH CANCER

### Cancer Survivors Redefine Life After Cancer



*Photo by Dr. Brian Berryman, Texas Oncology–Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center, at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro.*

# Cancer Survivors Redefine Life After Cancer



*Danielle Dennis and her daughter, Cailee Dennis.*

**Lewisville mom Danielle Dennis** worried she might not be able to cheer on her daughter's high school soccer team when she started treatment for ovarian cancer. She sat down with her husband, a friend, and her medical team at Texas Oncology—Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center to consider a range of treatment options.

Danielle chose moderately intense chemotherapy, along with participation in a clinical trial, in hopes of improving treatment for future patients. Today, she's been cancer-free for two years, and she has never missed a soccer game since her diagnosis. Danielle is now planning trips to her daughter's college games.

**“I worked with my doctor to choose the treatment option that would best help me keep doing what I love after cancer.”**

*Danielle Dennis, ovarian cancer thriver, Lewisville*

Danielle's story is becoming more common. With new treatments and technologies, today's cancer patient is more empowered than ever before, with opportunities to weigh how treatments may affect their lives. Cancer care teams work collaboratively with patients and their families to align treatment plans with individual goals so that patients thrive after cancer.

“Thriving after cancer means that patients do what they need to do to move forward,” says Lauren Brandt, LMSW, social worker at Texas Oncology—South Austin. “Maybe that's diving back into favorite hobbies. Maybe that's making a positive life change.

Or maybe that's finding a healthy way to work through post-treatment emotions.”

Of course, the top priority for everyone is the same: eliminating the cancer. But breakthroughs in science and medicine are giving more patients a better opportunity for living more robust post-cancer lives.

The American Cancer Society reports that there are now 14.5 million cancer survivors in the U.S., and the National Cancer Institute says cancer survivorship is up 40 percent from just 10 years ago. For that growing number, a shift is underway, from surviving to *thriving*.

## What Does it Mean to Thrive?

The cancer community talks a lot about the “new normal.” For many, normalcy is welcome after treatment. But for others, “normal” is not enough. “I decided that I wanted to live – really live – and not just wait around for cancer,” says Robin Gutierrez, a Texas Oncology—Odessa West Texas Cancer Center patient. Robin, Danielle, and countless others want to seize their opportunity after cancer and thrive.

Thriving can mean different things to each person – big goals, like climbing Mount Kilimanjaro or changing to a more fulfilling career. Or it can mean small ones, like showing kindness to other cancer patients, finding ways to tap into lifelong passions, or simply “being there” for family. Thriving is each patient working toward their “personal best” after cancer, however they define it.

“We see two sides to living well after cancer: medical and personal,” says Sabrina Mikan, Ph.D., RN, director of supportive care programs at Texas Oncology—Austin Central.



*Cailee Dennis playing soccer.*



*Robin Gutierrez and her husband.*

**“We want to empower patients to know there are many ways to thrive after cancer. Each person will find their own normal.”**

*Sabrina Mikan, Ph.D., RN, Director of Supportive Care Programs at Texas Oncology—Austin Central*

A PricewaterhouseCoopers study “From Surviving to Thriving: Cancer's Next Challenge” found that 71 percent of patients said they want a care team that is proactive about future needs and challenges they might face.

“To stay healthy moving forward, patients should always have a detailed history of their treatment, as well as written instructions on their future screening needs,” says Sabrina Mikan. “For the personal side, they can talk with their care team or social workers about resources in their area, or how to work with their existing support networks to help make the transition to thriving as a survivor.”

Texas Oncology care teams help patients transition out of treatment – informally, in conversations with doctors, nurses, or social workers, or as part of a specialized survivorship plan. In all cases, patients are encouraged to engage their care teams in discussions about life following treatment. Texas Oncology care teams are eager to help patients pursue their “personal best.”



**Lauren Brandt, LMSW**  
Social Worker  
Texas Oncology—South Austin



**Sabrina Mikan, Ph.D., RN**  
Director of Supportive Care Programs  
Texas Oncology—Austin Central



1. **Restart** your favorite hobby. Then restart your second, and then your third.



2. **Set aside** regular times to connect with loved ones and friends.



3. **Find** a volunteer opportunity that helps you bring joy to others.



4. **Talk** with a close friend about your cancer experience, including the emotional aspects.



5. **Book** a trip or sign up for an event you've always wanted to experience.

## The New and Next:

### How Five Texas Oncology Patients are Thriving

**For many cancer patients, the end of treatment represents a new beginning – one that includes a sense of renewal as well as empowerment to chart their next and future course in life.**

More Texas Oncology patients are thriving during and after treatment. From whacking softballs to tap dancing their way to recovery, they've decided to "carpe" many "diems," and on their own terms. See how five Texas Oncology patients are embracing the new and next:



**"Tap dancing gave me friends who weren't survivors.** It requires intense concentration and helped me retrain my brain, restore my balance, and strengthen my core after chemo and a hysterectomy. It was the answer to all of that. My husband says I am a different person – so high, happy, and at peace after three-hour music rehearsals. I'm a better singer than tap dancer, but either way I'm having fun."

*Sandra Fivecoat, thriving after endometrial cancer, Austin*



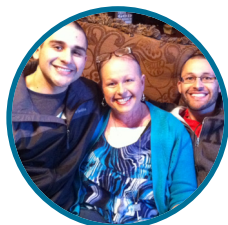
**"When you enter treatment, you have a choice** – you can dwell on where you are and what's happening, or you can focus on the things you have to look forward to. I would think, I can sit here and take this medicine, and I know that in two days I'm not going to feel good. But I also know that two days after that, I'll feel better."

*Danielle Dennis, thriving after ovarian cancer, Lewisville*



**"As a survivor, I want others to see me and know** that they can thrive and not just survive. I hope that as I bring flowers to the various clinics, the flowers continue to bring hope and joy to the patients. Bringing hope and brightening up the patients' days is a blessing to me."

*Yvonne Dubra, thriving after breast cancer, Houston*



**"I see a lot of people at the center, being treated with me,** and a lot of them are sad, and a lot of them are angry. And I understand why. Yes, we are sick. And it really, really stinks to be sick. But my faith tells me God has a plan for my life. For me, I am here today and I can do something good for somebody, even if it's just giving them a smile."

*Robin Gutierrez, thriving with breast cancer, Odessa*



**"I had so many people at my church praying for me and encouraging me.** They kept my spirits high, and I was determined to get through treatment and get back to doing what I love – working with my children, playing softball with my team, and doing what I can to give back."

*Dennis Jeter, thriving after melanoma, Dallas*

Read more of their stories at [www.TexasOncology.com/Thrive](http://www.TexasOncology.com/Thrive).

## About Texas Oncology

As an independent oncology practice, Texas Oncology is comprised of more than 420 physicians and more than 175 sites of service throughout Texas and southeastern Oklahoma and is a pioneer in community-based cancer care. Patients are treated with today's most advanced, effective cancer technologies and treatments, and have the opportunity to take part in some of the most promising clinical trials in the nation for new drugs and treatments for a broad range of cancers, near the critical support of family and friends.

[Texas Breast Specialists](#), [Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists](#), [Texas Urology Specialists](#), and [Texas Center for Proton Therapy](#) are a part of [Texas Oncology](#).

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## A “Mountaintop Moment” in Surviving Cancer



*Dr. Berryman and Chuck Wakefield before the climb.*

**“In a lot of ways, climbing a mountain is like fighting cancer,”** says Chuck Wakefield. He knows both fights well – he is a 12-year multiple myeloma survivor, and this year, summited Mount Kilimanjaro with his oncologist, Brian Berryman, M.D., Texas Oncology–Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center.

Dr. Berryman agrees. “You’re so focused on putting one foot in front of another on the

climb. But when you get to the top and look around – it’s amazing,” says Dr. Berryman. “But then you have to go back down. When you’re fighting cancer, getting to that cancer-free point is so meaningful. Both experiences leave you a changed person. And when you go back to your everyday life, you take those changes with you.”

Berryman and Wakefield – oncologist and cancer patient – share a passion for physical challenges that includes cycling and running marathons. For the Kilimanjaro climb, they joined a group that raised funds for the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation (MMRF), with the hope that research funded by their trip will help create more opportunities for multiple myeloma patients to thrive through their disease.

Read more of Chuck and Dr. Berryman’s story at [www.TexasOncology.com/Thrive](#).



## Treatment that Saves [Quality of] Lives

### Cancer patients want to get well today.

But they also want to *be* well tomorrow and for many days and years to come. Oncologists’ challenge is to eliminate the cancer, while protecting the patient’s overall health and quality of life. Working together to help the patient live the life they want after cancer often starts during treatment.

“One reason I joined Texas Oncology was to have the kind of relationships with my patients that we talk about what they want in the long-term and day-to-day,” says Thomas Harris, M.D., Texas Oncology–Waco. “If treatments start impacting that, we can examine other options and adjust our medical approach to better meet the patient’s unique needs and goals.”

“My goal for my patients is for them to recover quickly and have energy to do the things they want to do whether they’re on therapy or completed treatment,” says Dr. Harris.

**“I want to help my patients have a large quantity of high-quality life.”**

*Thomas Harris, M.D.,  
Medical Oncologist, Texas Oncology–Waco*

Advancements such as precision medications and robotic-assisted surgeries can help patients thrive after cancer by reducing side effects and improving quality of life.

### Precision Medications

Thanks to a more advanced understanding of cancer cell biology, genetics, and the human immune system, oncologists can administer medications that more precisely target cancer cells – and only cancer cells.

“The goal with precision medicine is to get excellent results with few side effects,” says Dr. Harris. “Even if we can’t eliminate side effects entirely in every case, these treatments usually are easier on patients and still very effective.”

### Robotic Assisted Surgeries

Dr. Roberto Rodriguez of Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists–Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center uses robotic assistance in surgeries to deliver fewer life-long side effects and quicker recoveries for his patients with colon or rectal cancer.

“Robotic surgery is a minimally invasive procedure, and allows patients to start chemotherapy much sooner after surgery,” Dr. Rodriguez says.

The rapid pace of the development of promising new cancer breakthroughs is creating more cancer survivors who are more able to live better lives after treatment – more thriving vs. merely surviving.



**Thomas Harris, M.D.**  
Medical Oncologist  
Texas Oncology–Waco



**Roberto Rodriguez, M.D.**  
Texas Oncology Surgical  
Specialists–Baylor Charles A.  
Sammons Center