Susan with Dr. Christina Bandera

Sign that greets patients at the Women's Medicine Inpatient Unit

A Women's Hospital Within a Hospital:

New women's inpatient unit offers specialized care at Rhode Island Hospital

"*I felt right at home,*" says Susan. The unit, which opened in March, offers female patients high-level comprehensive care in quiet, comfortable surroundings that promote healing.

When Susan, 69, was diagnosed with endometrial cancer, she was stunned: "*You could have knocked me over with a feather,*" she says. "*This was nothing I was expecting… I'd always been pretty healthy.*" Her gynecologist referred her to Christina Bandera, MD, director of the Center for Gynecologic Cancers at the Women's Medicine Collaborative and Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology at The Miriam Hospital and Rhode Island Hospital, who performed laparoscopic surgery using the state-of-the-art da Vinci robotic system.

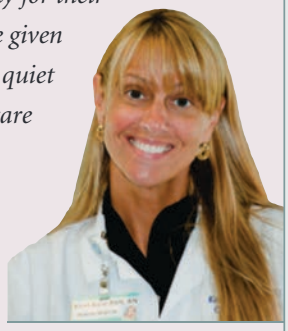
"*The robotic platform has become the preferred approach for many gynecologic cancer procedures,*" explains Dr. Bandera. This type of laparoscopy uses a three-dimensional camera and instruments that improve dexterity and enhance visualization so surgeons can perform procedures with extreme precision. In addition, the minimally invasive smaller incisions result in shorter recovery times, less blood loss, reduced trauma, and fewer complications. "*One of the biggest advantages over traditional surgery is a decreased risk of wound infection, and patients usually stay just one night in the hospital as opposed to three to five nights with traditional surgery through a large incision,*" adds Dr. Bandera.

The unit provides a full range of inpatient women's health services. Patients who are admitted include women who have benign gynecologic conditions, gynecologic cancers, medical conditions during and after pregnancy, and breast cancer surgery, including reconstruction. In addition, our team is seeing women for consults in the emergency department, operating room and units throughout the hospital for a variety of gynecologic and obstetric medicine issues. Procedures typically performed are robotic-assisted hysterectomies for bleeding or pain, hysterectomies for cancer of the uterus, cervix, and ovaries, cancer staging, complex surgeries to remove endometriosis, and procedures to preserve fertility such as fibroid removal or fallopian tube surgery. The multidisciplinary obstetric medicine service cares for women referred by obstetricians, midwives, gynecologists, internists and specialists for medical conditions during pregnancy or postpartum. "*Rhode Island Hospital is the best place to take care of these patients, who often require multiple specialties such as a cardiologist,*" says Dr. Bandera. In addition, the unit is the only women's medical floor that has the ability to do telemetry, which is used for monitoring patients who are at risk of abnormal heart activity. "*Being a women's hospital within a full-service hospital makes this unit unique,*" she adds.

Designed with the specific needs of women in mind, the 14-bed unit features all private rooms with private bathrooms and showers, a couch or fold-out sleep chair for a family member, free TV and Wi-Fi, as well as a quiet, comfortable family lounge."*Gynecologic and reproductive issues tend to be very private and emotionally charged,"* explains Dr. Bandera. *"We wanted to create a place within Rhode Island Hospital where women and their families could have privacy when dealing with these sensitive things, and the architects made it happen."* Located in the Jane Brown Building, the unit was completely gutted, rebuilt, and redesigned to be a comfortable, quiet place for healing.

As clinical manager of the unit, Kerri Kern, RN, BSN, is responsible for making sure the unit functions in a safe, effective manner so patients receive the best care possible. *"The idea of women being cared for by women is extremely important,"* she says. *"There is a huge need for this unit, a designated place for women whose needs are different from men."* Her clinical inpatient team includes specialized medical-surgical nurses, all with ob-gyn experience, as well as a designated case manager that assists patients with dischargeneeds.

"We have made it a safe environment with staff who have a high level of expertise in women's needs. This makes women feel like they're being cared for specifically for their diagnosis," Kerri explains. *"Patients are given comfortable pink robes to wear, it's very quiet and aesthetically very pleasing, but the care is really the most positive part,"* she adds. For Susan, the unit's nurses and staff provided a supportive, nurturing experience during her stay there. *"When it's gynecologic surgery, it's just more comfortable having women around,"* she says.



Kerri Kern, RN, BSN

Susan is amazed at the efficiency of her care and recovery. *"I had the procedure a couple weeks after it was diagnosed, and they had me up and walking within a few hours afterward. I was home by the next day,"* she recalls. At her post-operative visit with Dr. Bandera, Susan received the good news—*"She told me I was cancer-free—that it was only stage-one so we caught it early—and I wouldn't have to do any more treatment, except follow-up visits every three to four months… I was thrilled!"*

Women's Medicine Inpatient Unit by the Numbers

Clinical Team

14 Multidisciplinary Obstetric Medicine Service physicians, Women's Medicine Collaborative

21 Ob-Gyn Associates practitioners, including physicians, certified nurse midwives, and registered nurse practitioners

8 Cancer services physicians, registered nurse practitioners, and physician assistants, Women's Medicine Collaborative

17 Lifespan breast program physicians, including specialists in radiation oncology and plastic surgery/breastre construction

Features

14 Private rooms with private bathrooms and showers

1 each Gynecologic procedure room, conference room, family lounge

Foxglove bloom on cover, photographed by Dr. Jason Hack, Emergency Medicine Physician and Director of Medical Toxicology at Rhode Island Hospital, is part of a photography installation in the Women's Medicine Inpatient Unit.

With stories like Susan's and excellent patient feedback, Dr. Bandera envisions the Women's Medicine Inpatient Unit becoming *"the go-to place in Rhode Island for gynecologic oncology and obstetric medicine patients who want the security of being in a full-service hospital."* As the only comprehensive women's health unit in the state to also be part of a full-service, academic hospital, Dr. Bandera and her colleagues are proud to be a part of it. *"We're proud of the services we provide and the physical appearance of the unit. It's a very friendly place and we're all committed to having a collaborative rapport with each other. Patients perceive that,"* she says. *"I think we all feel it's our home."*

"She told me I was cancer-free—that it was only stage-one so we caught it early—and I wouldn't have to do any more treatment, except follow-up visits every three to four months… I was thrilled!"
—Susan, patient

Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation Donates 500 "Janes" Gowns to Pappas Center

Each year, more than 25,000 women are seen at the Anne C. Pappas Center for Breast Imaging at Rhode Island Hospital. Now, thanks to the generosity of the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation, patients undergoing screening mammograms and other breast procedures will have some extra help to feel more dignified.

In May, the Foundation made a special gift in honor of all mothers and daughters by donating 500 hospital gowns called "Janes" to the Pappas Center. The unique gowns were developed by Sharon Linder from Get Janes, LLC, and feature the Foundation's logo opposite that of the Pappas Center and Rhode Island Hospital, to help spread awareness on the importance of routine screenings and self-advocacy. Recently, the Foundation has made a similar gift of gowns to the hospital's dedicated Women's Inpatient Unit.

"We are so thankful to the Gemma Foundation for their generosity in helping us fulfill our mission of providing compassionate, state-of-the-art breast imaging and diagnosis," says Dr. Martha Mainiero, the center's director. ***"With a dedicated team that specializes in early detection and diagnosis of breast cancer, the donation of 'Janes,' which were specifically designed with the mammography procedure in mind, will help us make each and every patient experience the best it can be."***

A mammogram—particularly a patient's first—can cause anxiety both before and during the procedure, so the new "Janes" gowns were designed to help women feel at ease. Their special lightweight knit fabric and wrap closure provide maximum coverage with an emphasis on comfort.

"We understand how nerve-racking the mammogram process can be, so we wanted to help women feel comfortable with an alternative to the more traditional hospital gown," says Maria Gemma, executive director of the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation. ***"Since we work yearlong to promote early detection, this gift is a salute to those being proactive with their health through routine screenings. It's also a reminder that we are there for them, their family members and friends, if they ever need us."***

Gloria Gemma®
Breast Cancer Resource Foundation
GIVE HOPE. GIVE SUPPORT. GIVE LOCAL.

Since its inception 10 years ago, the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation has worked diligently to collaborate with hospitals, oncologists and other partners to offer free breast health awareness, education and support programs in the local community. At the heart of their work is the promotion of early detection and routine screenings to save lives.