

Vivian's Story



Vivian credits the care she received at the University of New Mexico Comprehensive Cancer Center for her survival of both breast cancer and uterine cancer.

Credit: National Cancer Institute

Proud Member of the Navajo Nation—and Clinical Trial Participant

Vivian was met with silence when she reached out to fellow Navajo women about what their breast cancer treatment was like.

“A lot of Navajo women don’t speak for themselves,” she said, “so no one came forward.” But her strong desire to beat the illness led her to seek treatment anyway and to participate in a clinical trial for a new treatment approach offered at the University of New Mexico (UNM) Comprehensive Cancer Center.

With her diagnosis, Vivian’s first thought was of her kids. “The cancer had spread to my lymph nodes, but I was determined to beat this and be there for my family.” Treatment was difficult, but her family’s loving support kept her going.

“My kids would say, ‘Mom you’re fit, you’re strong, you’re very strong. We want to have you more,’” she recalled. That, Vivian said, and the thoughtful and thorough explanation of what it meant to be in a clinical trial from her care team at the cancer center was what helped her make the decision.

Today, Vivian is 70 years old. Without the cancer center, she might not have had the same access to clinical trials or the latest treatments. And with care from the UNM center, she beat cancer again—uterine, this time—in 2017.

“I’m very thankful for my doctors at UNM,” she said, now cancer-free. She’s enjoying being the matriarch of her family and especially loves being a grandmother of 14. “Cancer doesn’t have to be a death sentence,” she said. “I’m a testament to that.”

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—Vivian

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