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NEWS RELEASE

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Young Sisters Undergo Genetic Cancer Test – One Undergoes Preventative Mastectomy

At 24-years-old, Shannon Harris is one of the youngest women in the nation to have undergone a preventative double mastectomy after testing positive with a gene that increases the risk of developing breast cancer. Shannon and her sister Kyla, 19, of Chandler, have a genetic history with breast cancer - their grandmother, mother, aunt, and a cousin died from the disease, which was occurring earlier in age with each generation.

It wasn't until Shannon and Kyla's cousins tested positive for a gene mutation that causes breast cancer when they learned about a genetic test to detect the likelihood of developing the disease. They contacted the Comprehensive Cancer Center at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center to undergo a genetic evaluation and blood test to determine if they were carriers of the gene mutation.

"I noticed that breast cancer had hit every generation in our family and decided we should take care of the risk factor now rather than waiting until it was too late," says Kyla.

Shannon tested positive as a gene carrier for the disease while Kyla tested negative. **As a result of Shannon's genetic test, she recently underwent a double mastectomy to prevent breast cancer from developing, which will reduce her chances of developing breast cancer by more than 95 percent.**

"My results did not come as a shock, I was expecting it," says Shannon. "I couldn't imagine living my life knowing I would likely have the cancer one day and not do anything to prevent it. The assessment and test gave me answers and options."

St. Joseph's offers genetic risk assessments for people who have had cancer or have a family history of cancer. Participants meet privately with a board certified genetic counselor at St. Joseph's for a consultation to review their family history of cancer. Genetic education is provided and recommendations are discussed. If genetic testing is appropriate, participants will undergo a blood test that is covered by most insurance companies. The assessments focus on breast, colorectal, ovarian and melanoma cancers.

"We know that some cancers are genetically related, and we know a patient's lifetime risk of developing certain types of cancer are greatly increased if the patient inherits a harmful mutation in a gene," says Edward Donahue, MD, medical director of the Comprehensive Cancer Center. "If someone has a family history of cancer, it should be investigated to identify if they're at risk."

—St. Joseph's—

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