

Steve K. started his retirement in October of 2016 to find out that he had lung cancer a mere six months later as a never-smoker. Experiencing some severe stomach pain and persistent cough and fatigue in April of 2017, Steve went into the ER. Confirming it wasn't appendicitis, the doctor sent him to his primary care physician for a follow-up.

Knowing he was going on a mission trip to Africa the following week, Steve went to the doctor for a CT scan before leaving. The scan revealed that there wasn't anything in his gut that was causing problems. Instead, he had lung cancer that had spread to his lymphatic system and adrenal glands.

"The next day, I had a biopsy of my adrenal gland. Thankfully, the marker PD-L1 had a go-to immunotherapy I could get at Regions Hospital starting in May," Steve explains. "During this time, I also got second opinions at the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota."

Over the next two years, Steve had 28 infusions of Keytruda over three-week periods. "The doctors were pleased to find that there weren't any new tumors. However, the ones already there continued to grow slowly."

After talking to his oncologist, Steve and his medical team decided to radiate his adrenal glands stereotactically, which is a five-day treatment that targets the tumor and minimizes hitting other organs. Next, Steve received stereotactic radiation to his lungs and lymph nodes. One of his tumors was between his aorta and his vena cava - a precarious spot where if you get too close, you can hit the spine or the aorta, both of which would have repercussions.

During this time, Steve's tumors started to shrink, and he remained on Keytruda. However, in the fall of 2018, fluid build-up was found in his lungs either as a new manifestation of the cancer or as a result of his immune system attacking his lungs. To be safe, Steve went off of Keytruda.

Today, Steve gets a CT scan of his abdomen every six months and no longer needs an MRI scan of his head. Thankfully, his cancer is stable, and he can travel often. He just got back from Iceland a couple of weeks ago.

After hearing about A Breath of Hope from one of our founders, Mary Jane McKeon, he became a volunteer driver for our patient transportation program in September 2021. Over two years later, he is one of our most committed volunteers.

