

# 'I FEEL LIKE I DODGED A BULLET'

## WOMAN'S RARE CONDITION AND STOMACH REMOVAL FEATURED IN DOCUMENTARY

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It was a rare diagnosis, so uncommon that only a handful of other families in Canada and very few around the world have ever been documented with the condition.

But that was just what Georgetown's Pamela Traynor found herself coming to terms with earlier this year: that she has a rare gene predisposing her to stomach cancer, which could be fatal - and had just claimed the life of her cousin.

"I was devastated," she recalled of receiving the news.

What came next was equally out of the ordinary - dramatic laparoscopic surgery to completely remove her stomach.

The mother of two's plight is featured in a mini-documentary recently released by the Sinai Health Foundation, following the intense process her surgical oncologist Dr. Savtaj Brar went through to give her a stomach cancer-free future.

"Like most surgeries, the decision to operate or not operate is the most difficult. It's a patient-driven decision," said Brar. "And she didn't have a cancer - she was trying to avoid getting a fairly aggressive cancer. We told her we thought she would get it in the future, but we had no guarantees."

Traynor's journey began



Mount Sinai Hospital photo

Above: Mount Sinai surgical oncologist Dr. Savtaj Brar operating on Georgetown resident Pamela Traynor. Left: Pamela Traynor, living a healthy life today after a complete gastrectomy earlier this year.



when she first found out about her cousin's passing in a family email last November.

"Her dad said she tested positive for the stomach cancer gene, and it's hereditary," she said.

"She had a stomach full of polyps. And I'm reading this, thinking, 'Oh my God, I've got a stomach full of polyps that I've known about for 12 or 13 years.'"

While previous scopes had always assured Traynor that her polyps were benign, she decided to reach out to Mount Sinai Hospital, which had treated her cousin, to find out more about the genetics of the situation.

They invited her in for testing, which revealed that she has the rare gene - a condition that has been documented in fewer than five families in Canada at the time of her diagnosis and under 20 families worldwide, said Brar.

After coming to terms with the results, the 58-year-old said she first asked if she could put the surgery off so that she could en-

joy her son's upcoming wedding - an event that was later postponed due to the pandemic.

"But it's an aggressive cancer, so I turned my decision around and called the surgeon and said, 'When can you book me in?'"

On February 12, Traynor arrived at Mount Sinai for a grueling day - 10 hours on the operating table for a complete gastrectomy and construction of a new pouch-like stomach that's actually part of her intestines.

"Her condition was too rare to have guidelines set up for treatment, so we were kind of flying without a compass, but on the

same page with what we thought needed to get done," said Brar, adding they discovered that Traynor had hundreds of polyps in her stomach, but none of them were yet cancerous.

"We came up with a novel way to do the pouch completely laparoscopically, so her recovery would be better from the incisions and surgical stress, but also from having this pouch, which results in a better quality of life and less weight loss."

Remarkably, Traynor said, she had almost no discomfort during her recovery, aside from the initial gas pains that can happen following laparoscopic surgery.

"It was a pretty emotional time, but I got through it," she said. "People wonder, how do you survive without a stomach? Well, you can. I call it (the stomach formed from her intestines) my golden pouch, and it's been a godsend. I feel like I dodged a bullet."

Today, Traynor's life is essentially back to normal, aside from the fact that she can't eat large meals and still has a bit of fatigue that can sometimes linger after such an intense surgery.

"She's quite an extraordinary patient," said Brar. "It was heartwarming, how brave she was for her kids, and you can see that in the film. She's a brave and resolute person, and that spirit has served her quite well in the recovery."

The rest of Traynor's family has been tested - a process that revealed her 31-year-old son also has the rare gene. He currently has no stomach polyps and is being monitored with annual scopes.

November 30 marks Stomach Cancer Awareness Day. For more information, visit [mygutfeeling.ca](http://mygutfeeling.ca).

The documentary featuring Traynor is available to view at [supportsinai.ca](http://supportsinai.ca).

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