

A Decade of Love

by Adama Dyoniziak, Executive Director, Champions for Health

“At first I didn’t know why I was feeling bad,” remembers Alicia LG. “Then I was told I would need surgery and medication for life. After the thyroid surgery, my situation was different. The treatment changed my life.” Alicia is one of many uninsured patients who receive free specialty care treatment, procedures and surgeries through Project Access, a program of Champions for Health.

[at right: Alicia LG and her surgeon, Dr. Bremner]



Alicia was diagnosed in 2009 with thyroid cancer and had to simultaneously deal with other life issues as well: her father died, she was raising three children, and her husband was ill and on dialysis. She had delayed care for herself throughout her life until her husband’s death, leaving her a young widow.



For Rebecca Valenzuela, Project Access Manager, it was a complicated case. Rebecca worked diligently with Alicia and her many specialists, helping to shape Rebecca’s case management strategy. Alicia spoke warmly, “Project Access is something wonderful, they give their time and treat you well. They don’t charge anything and have a lot of patience with you.”

[at left: Alicia smiling because her new range of motion allows her to pose for photos]

Ten years after her thyroid cancer, Alicia was again referred to Project Access for severe right shoulder pain, and Rebecca was by her side again. “When my shoulder first started to hurt, I was unable to work or do chores. I did not know that my bones had degenerated and I would need surgery.” Alicia had a massive full rotator cuff tear that required a reverse total shoulder arthroplasty.

Dr. Luke Bremner, from Core Orthopaedic, provided the pro bono surgery. “Volunteer work is always gratifying – it is the reason we go into medicine – to help people.” When Dr. Bremner was in high school, his best friend had Ewing’s sarcoma. He accompanied him to his surgeries and chemotherapy visits. He wanted to do more. “No one in my family was in medicine, but I went medical school to be a pediatric oncologist. During my third year rotations, it became clear that I had a surgical mindset, so I became an orthopedic surgeon.” Dr. Bremner had a calling to help others and put his skills to the best use. Alicia shares, “Dr. Bremner was a godsend. I have been lucky to have been treated so wonderfully. I thank him for everything he did for me.”

“Our patients show us what resilience really looks like,” says Rebecca. “It is a pleasure to help patients who live in my community.” During the past 10 years, each patient at Project Access has given her a learning opportunity. Rebecca remembers a moment when her grandma was on her deathbed. “I was doing little things to keep her comfortable. My Aunt asked me if I was a nurse. And I responded: ‘Not yet!’ Rebecca will be starting the Nurse Practitioner program at Azusa Pacific University in May 2020. The decade of love between patient, care manager and many volunteer physicians, creates a full circle of gratitude, transforming more than one life in the process.

[at right: Alicia LG and Rebecca Valenzuela, Project Access Manager]

