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photo courtesy of **Pamela Tuli, M.D.**

*Memorial Physician Clinics
The Medical Oncology Group*

As I think of this special Meet the Doctors edition of *South Mississippi Living*, I reflect on what it means to be part of the medical field today, particularly as an oncologist practicing on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Within the world of medicine, oncology has always been such a special field to be in. You have the privilege to help patients and their families through a very difficult and vulnerable time in their lives. It is a unique subspecialty because it truly allows for the development of the doctor-patient relationship. My patients teach me so much about life, love, family, friendship, perseverance, gratitude, and even myself.

Oncology is also a very exciting field to be in today as we are truly experiencing a revolution. Immunotherapy, which utilizes a patient's own immune system to attack their cancer, is transforming the field of oncology. In addition, we are moving toward more personalized care, as we find new molecular markers that allow us to specifically target an individual's tumor, leading to better outcomes with less toxicity. There are a plethora of new drugs with results that would have been incomprehensible just a few years ago. The pace is truly astonishing – it is so exciting to be a part of this.

When I was a medical student and resident in the late 1990s, there was one drug available to treat colon cancer. Today, there are so many more drug options, all of which have significantly improved survival and quality of life for our patients. Similar improvements have been seen across most cancer types.

I would like to share with you Aja's story. I first met Aja when she was diagnosed with Stage III colon cancer when she was 32 years old. She underwent surgery and chemotherapy, but, unfortunately, her cancer quickly



returned and spread. She went through all the standard therapies available, but, by age 34, had progressed through all of them. At this point, she was near bed bound. She still had a strong will to live, and, thus, as a final therapy option, we tried a new immunotherapy drug. Within several weeks of starting the innovative medication, she was able to walk unassisted into my office, and within two months of starting the therapy she had no evidence of her cancer. That was in March of 2016, and Aja remains disease free today. Aja, fortunately, is not an anomaly. Thanks to recent advances in our field, her story is one shared by many.

I feel very fortunate to have found a field of practice that I am passionate about. I also feel blessed to live and practice on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I am a Pennsylvania native who arrived here through Keesler Air Force Base. Having trained at a large academic center in Philadelphia, I was accustomed to cutting-edge therapies and working with physicians who were leaders in their fields. When I made the decision to make Mississippi my permanent home, I thought I would need to give up that medical environment. However, I quickly found that not to be the case. At Memorial Hospital at Gulfport, we have highly skilled physicians across all specialties allowing us to provide the latest, cutting edge therapies for most diseases so that our Mississippi Gulf Coast residents can get the care they need close to home.