Employee forever grateful for physician's encouragement and persistence for follow-up care

Jessica Farmer has been a grill cook and cashier at the Cafe of St. Francis Medical Center for the past four years. During that time, Jessica has gotten to know the many faces of physicians, nurses and staff at St. Francis who stop by for a snack or meal.

One physician in particular, Dr. Valerie McLaughlin, Chief of Emergency Medicine at St. Francis, became very a familiar face, and Jessica is forever grateful for that.

In August 2018, Jessica began a typical workday but had the feeling something wasn't right. She started having severe abdominal pain, and eventually trouble breathing. She couldn't concentrate on work no matter how hard she tried. She eventually agreed to go the Emergency Room at St. Francis.

At the ER, Jessica was examined by Dr. McLaughlin. She was sent for a CT scan, which showed an abnormality. She then received an ultrasound for a more detailed view. The pain eventually subsided as she waited for the results. Jessica decided to head back to work.

In the meantime, the results came in.

"I didn't want to find out the result of the test," Jessica said. "I was scared, and even though I never had that severe type of pain, I just wanted my body to fix the problem on its own. I had ovarian cysts before so I thought that might be the case again this time."

Dr. McLaughlin, however, knew the test results. Each day for the next three weeks, she would ask Jessica to talk about the results. Jessica would politely decline. "I just didn't want to know."

Eventually, Dr. McLaughlin tried a new tactic.

"I told her I had something I needed to show her in my office, and asked her to stop by. She agreed. When she arrived, I showed her the written report of the ultrasound."

The report showed that Jessica had a mass on her left ovary. The mass was measured in millimeters but Jessica quickly realized it was about the size of a grapefruit.

"I'll never forget what Dr. McLaughlin said to me," said Jessica. "She said, 'It looks like more a mass than a cyst. And it won't take care of itself. You need follow-up care.' I was scared because I knew it was serious then."
Jessica started doing research and worked with her supervisor to find the next available day to schedule a follow-up appointment. A few weeks later, Jessica was being wheeled into surgery.

"The wait between scheduling the follow-up appointment and the day of surgery felt so long. I kept crying thinking it was cancer."

But Jessica got the best possible news after surgery. The tumor was benign.

"I cried again because I was so grateful."

She thought of Dr. McLaughlin right away and looked forward to telling her the good news.

"I was so thrilled to hear it. And very proud of Jessica for following through when it was certainly a scary situation."

To show her appreciation, Jessica recently purchased a Leaf on the Tree of Life at St. Francis Medical Center. Each leaf represents a donation made in honor of a patient or staff member.

"I'm so grateful that Jessica honored me with a Leaf," said Dr. McLaughlin. "It's humbling to know that a seemingly small gesture had such a profound impact on her life."

"I honestly feel Dr. McLaughlin gave me a second chance at life," said Jessica. "Oftentimes, you'll get a diagnosis and feel on-your-own to figure out the next step, but she was my guardian angel, with me every step of the way. I will always be grateful."