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family members who may be at increased risk, says Angela Brickle, a genetic counselor with the Georgia Cancer Center at Augusta University. "If they find out they have the same positive result, there are medical management choices that can help them to be more proactive – maybe increased breast screening or colonoscopies more frequently or starting at an earlier age," she says. "There are options for family members to be proactive at taking care of their health."

Occasionally preventive measures can be drastic, particularly for women like Amanda Cromer and Maegan Myers, who have both been diagnosed with breast cancer. Cromer, 42, of Lake View, Ala., traveled to CTCA in Newnan when she felt something lacking in the treatment she was receiving closer to home. Genetic tests revealed she not only had the BRCA1 mutation, but also a separate mutation that increased her risk of colon cancer.

Myers, 38, of Grovetown, received genetic testing at Georgia Cancer Center due to her young age at diagnosis and "strong family history of cancer," she says. Genetic tests revealed that while she did not have BRCA1 or BRCA2, she did carry a mutation in a different gene, called Chek2, which increases her risk of developing cancer in the opposite breast.

Both women opted to have double mastectomies; Cromer also had a hysterectomy.

"The test enabled me to work with my doctors and map out my treatment plan," says Myers. "I am very grateful that we went through it."

Both women are mothers and say that while their children have not been tested, at some point they suspect genetic test results may be helpful in guiding treatment or preventive measures for them as well. Cromer, whose daughter is 15, says "I would encourage her to have children and to go ahead and have them as soon as possible, and from my perspective I would encourage her to have a double mastectomy and hysterectomy."

Already Cromer's test results have prompted her and her brother to begin early colonoscopies for signs of colon cancer.

"This kind of testing and information is not insignificant or minimal," says



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Georgia-based company provides new hope for cancer patients

For more than 35 years, Ken Dixon, M.D., FACS, a surgeon with Surgical Oncology of Northeast Georgia, has treated cancer patients in his practice located in Gainesville, Ga.

"After a lifetime taking care of cancer patients, telling a patient or a family member 'there is nothing left to do' just got harder and harder," Dixon said.

Driven by these very personal experiences with his patients, in 2015 Dixon began a journey to do more. This journey led him to



Ken Dixon, M.D., FACS, founder of Specicare

tumor tissue and its power to create new options in care. It also led him to the emerging field of precision medicine and the development of a tissue storage and banking process for the individual benefit of the patient called Specicare.

Eighty-five percent of cancers are treated in community settings such as Gainesville. Dixon believes Specicare can serve as the missing link connecting community-based care to the most advanced medical treatments for the cancer patient and deliver that treatment, for the most part, at home.

"In today's growing revolution of personalized cancer therapies, saving as much available tumor tissue from each patient is now more important than ever. Discarding valuable tumor tissue is no longer an option and keeping as much of it as possible is needed to derive critical data to drive the best treatment decisions," said Laszlo Radvanyi, PhD, past senior vice president and head of Immuno-Oncology Research at EMD Serono and current chair Specicare Advisory Board. "Specicare is uniquely positioning itself to be a central hub to acquire, process, and bank tumors from individual patients to derive critical genetic and functional data guiding not only more individualized therapies but also as a valuable source of tissue for research on more highly effective cancer therapies."

Specicare saves an individual's living tumor tissue by freezing it in a viable (living) state, making it available for individual, patient-directed research and clinical testing. A small amount of dead tumor tissue is currently used by local pathology, discarding the rest as medical waste. Specicare's live tumor tissue banking process enables access to previously inaccessible innovative testing, clinical trials and cutting-edge therapies to improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

"We know that when time matters most, patients want answers, options and quality of life," Dixon said. "By bringing the focus of cancer research to the individual patient, we believe we will be able to provide access to solutions that could extend life beyond months to years. We aren't doing the science. We are just providing access to it."

Dixon's message to patients and their families is a simple one.

"You only get one chance to save your tumor tissue. Don't throw it away."

For more information about Specicare visit specicare.com or call (770) 870-5338.