

suburban life

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Capital Health,
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women's health
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Dr. Joyce Varughese, a gynecologic oncologist with **Capital Health**, has devoted her career to protecting women's health at home and abroad.

by **Bill Donahue**
photography by
Alison Dunlap

Joyce Varughese, M.D., FACOG, remembers coming of age with a strong desire to “save the world.” Today, as the medical director of gynecologic oncology with Capital Health Surgical Group in Pennington, New Jersey, Dr. Varughese is making a lasting difference in the lives of people she meets—both close to home and much farther afield.

Originally from Staten Island, New York, Dr. Varughese joined Capital Health nearly three years ago. Her particular area of specialty, gynecologic oncology, involves caring for women whose lives have been affected by cancers and precancers of the female reproductive system. Since her arrival, Capital Health's gynecologic oncology program has

Woman's Champion

experienced significant growth—meaning more women are receiving treatment to improve their quality of life and quite possibly even save their lives.

“Last year we saw 300 new patients, and the prior year it was 265,” she says. “We’re on pace to meet or exceed that growth this year.”

Dr. Varughese is passionate about women’s health. Although she had long envisioned a career in medicine, she initially thought she might specialize in nephrology. She “was drawn to” gynecologic oncology during her residency at Yale New Haven Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut.

“Patients and their families—that’s what drew me to the subspecialty,” she says. “You form a very special bond with your patients. You get to care for young, healthy women, and also take care of the sickest patients. I like that I get to spend time with people during a difficult time, and comfort and console their families.”

Dr. Varughese is yet another example of Capital Health’s commitment to providing comprehensive cancer care to patients in the communities in which they live. Since September 2018, when Cataldo Doria, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., FACS, began his tenure as medical director of Capital Health Cancer Center, Capital Health has transformed its oncology program into one of the region’s foremost destinations for patients facing a cancer diagnosis.

As proof of its recent progress, Capital Health has earned two sought-after designations: Center of Excellence in Minimally Invasive Gynecology; and Center of Excellence in Robotic Surgery, both from Surgical Review Corporation (SRC). Dr. Varughese, who is an SRC Surgeon of Excellence in both Minimally Invasive Gynecology and Robotic Surgery, uses the da Vinci robotic surgery system to perform the most delicate of surgeries with utmost precision.

“Robotic surgery really has been a practice changer,” she adds. “We can now do a hysterectomy through four to five small incisions, and the patient can usually go home the same day as the surgery. The surgery tends to be a lot gentler on the patient; oftentimes, they don’t even require narcotics afterward. As a result, they can go back to work sooner and get back to their normal routine sooner.”

Removing Barriers

Dr. Varughese treats patients mostly out of Capital Health Medical Center - Hopewell, though she hopes to soon expand to other locations in Mercer County and across the river in Bucks County. She has a particular interest in treating women from underserved communities, and is a champion of prevention through regular health screenings.

While some gynecologic cancers are treatable when caught early, if not largely preventable, Dr. Varughese says too many people face barriers to adequate screening and early interventions.

“In 21st century America, I should not be treating advanced cervical cancer, but I do because the underserved and uninsured make up a significant part of the population,” she says. “More than 14,000 new cases [of cervical cancer] will be diagnosed this year in the United States, along with more than 4,000

deaths. In New Jersey alone, we’re estimating more than 400 new cases for this year. It’s a preventable form of cancer, and we’re doing everything we can to go out and educate women in the community and bring care closer to where they are.”

Dr. Varughese’s efforts to make a difference extend beyond direct patient care. She enjoys lecturing about women’s health issues, and has presented her research at national meetings and in peer-reviewed journals. She also serves the New Jersey chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics as an HPV expert, and is a member of the Diversity, Inclusion, and Health Equity Committee for the Society of Gynecologic Oncology.

Her desire to make an impact has taken her far from home. As an active member of the International Gynecologic Cancer Society (IGCS), she has served as a gynecologic cancer expert for the Virtual Tumor Board with Da Nang Hospital, Vietnam, and as an international site mentor for the IGCS Gynecologic Oncology fellowship at Uganda Cancer Institute in Uganda, Africa.

“I have gotten to play a part in empowering physicians in low-resource settings where there is so much devastation,” she says. “The Uganda fellowship has graduated a few classes of fellows, and they have all stayed within the African continent. Since

the fellowship started, the number of people who are interested and involved in the field has doubled. That’s one way I feel like I’m getting to help save the world.”

Closer to home, Dr. Varughese is excited for the opportunity to further Capital Health’s efforts to deliver world-class cancer care within her own community.

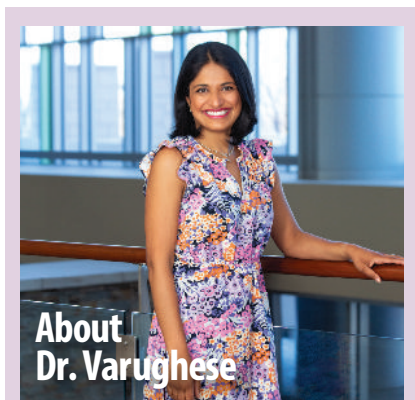
“Patients like being able to have their care in one place, and that’s exactly what we have tried to provide here,” she says. “Look at the educational background and training of the people we have on staff; it’s comparable to any major academic institution. There’s not a specialty we’re lacking in, and we all work together as a team to discuss each patient’s cancer and create a treatment plan.

“As it relates to my area of specialty, patients were having to go to New Brunswick or Philadelphia before I got here,” she continues. “That’s pretty far for some people, especially if they’re having to go for daily treatment, like radiation. We’re here, we’re local, and we have a lot of quality initiatives in place to make sure each patient receives the care they need when they need it.” ■



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—Dr. Joyce Varughese
Capital Health



About Dr. Varughese

Dr. Varughese received her undergraduate degree magna cum laude from Harvard University and earned her medical degree at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in Bronx, New York. She completed her fellowship training in gynecologic oncology and residency in obstetrics and gynecology, serving as administrative chief resident, at Yale University. She earned her board certification in gynecologic oncology through the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology in 2017, the same year she began her tenure as an assistant professor with Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

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