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Cancer patient gets new lease on life through clinical trial

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Arizona resident Evelyn Sorensen is in a far different place today than she was six months ago, thanks to a cutting-edge cancer clinical trial being conducted at the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center at Scottsdale Healthcare in partnership with the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen).

When Sorensen was diagnosed with stage two cervical cancer two years ago, she underwent rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. But the cancer eventually spread to her lymph nodes. Doctors told her they were inoperable, and there were no other standard treatment options available to her.

“I was out of options, and I wasn’t happy to hear that,” said Sorensen, a resident of Mesa. “I’m 47 years old and I’m not ready to say goodbye just yet.”

Sorensen then learned of the BIND-014 clinical trial being conducted through Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center Clinical Trials, and quickly joined the study in August of 2011. Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center Clinical Trials is a partnership between Scottsdale Healthcare and TGen that treats cancer patients with promising new drugs.

BIND-014, created by BIND Biosciences in Cambridge, Mass., is being studied in patients with advanced or metastatic cancer. It uses microscopic drones to deliver medicine directly to cancer cells, increasing the drug’s effectiveness and minimizing side effects. The

study is led in Scottsdale by Dr. Daniel Von Hoff, chief scientific officer at Scottsdale Healthcare and physician-in-chief at TGen.

After her first treatment on the study in September 2011, Sorensen's tumors began to shrink rapidly. Today, doctors say her cancer has diminished substantially, although she still takes the medication to maintain the results. Sorensen is beyond thrilled with the outcomes.

"I didn't even have any of the horrible side effects that are associated with chemotherapy such as weight loss or hair loss," she said. "I even joked with Dr. Von Hoff that I thought he was giving me a placebo because I didn't feel anything!"

Scientists and oncologists say this new nanoparticle treatment could be a big step in the fight against cancer and have high hopes for the future of this kind of targeted therapy.

"Cancer cells are very good at erecting a defense against foreign harmful substances," said Dr. Ramesh Ramanthan, M.D., medical director of Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center Clinical Trials. "We think that nanoparticles may be the solution to penetrating cancer cells and delivering cancer drugs more effectively."

As for Sorensen, the future is looking much brighter than it did for her six months ago. She is now strong enough to return to work and is back to swimming and enjoying her life.

"It's so hard to explain because at one moment you're trying to get your affairs in order and you only have a year to live, and then all of the sudden you are offered hope, a chance to live," said Sorensen. "And I intend to take advantage of every moment of it."