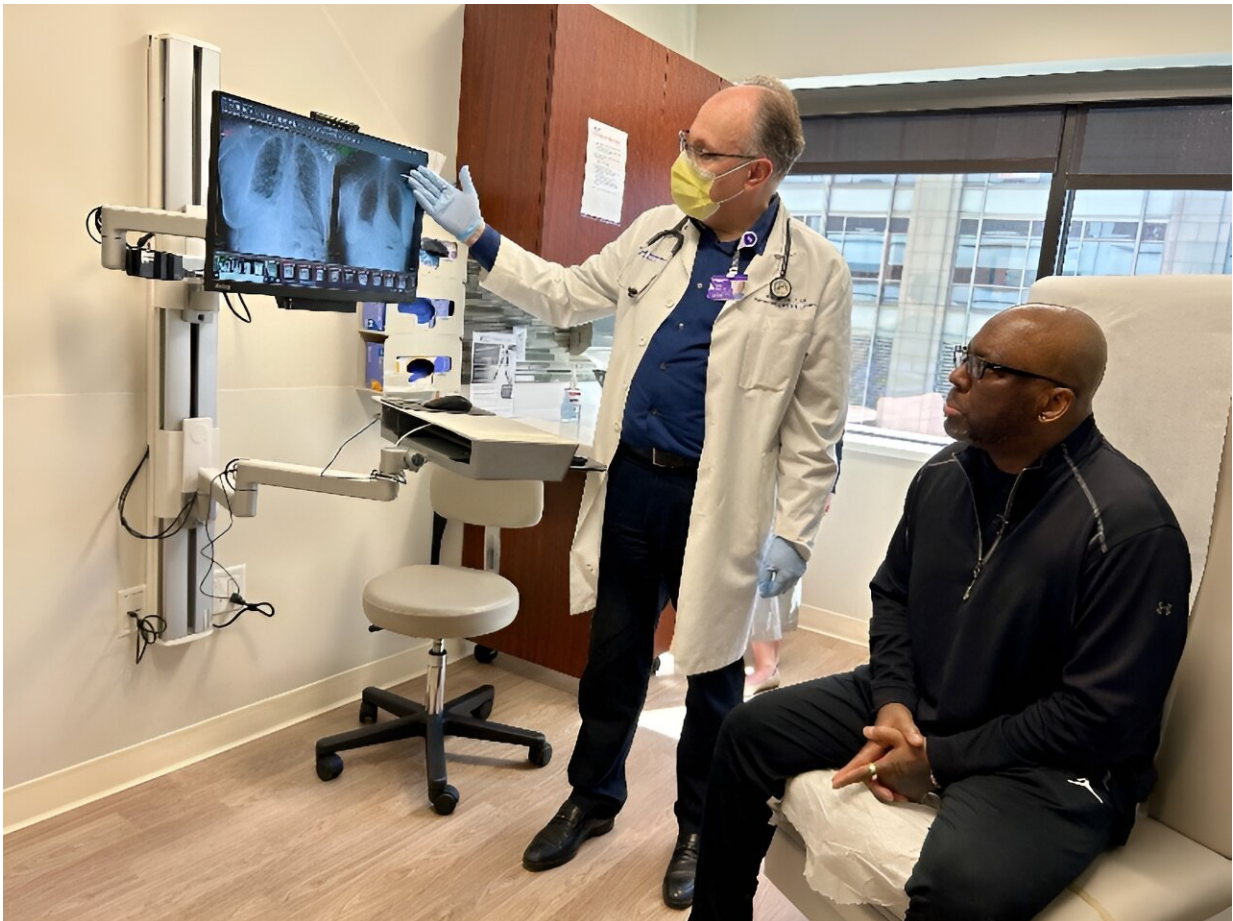


Cancer and COVID drove patient to double-lung transplant

May 13 2024, by Dennis Thompson



Chicago resident Arthur "Art" Gillespie fell ill in early March 2020 with

COVID, after he and his father went to visit an uncle in a nursing facility.

"I was hospitalized for 12 days with a high fever and cough, and during that time, they were taking scans of my lungs, which showed stage 1 lung cancer on my right lung," Gillespie, 56, recalled in a news release. "I had no symptoms of lung cancer, so in a way—because of COVID—we were able to catch the cancer early."

Gillespie ultimately lost his father, uncle and cousin to COVID, and came incredibly close to losing his own life.

Gillespie had one lung damaged by [cancer](#) and the other damaged by [COVID](#), ultimately leaving him with just one last chance for survival.

Doctors at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago saved his life through a double-lung transplant that took place in January—the first such procedure involving two lungs damaged by two different ailments, they said.

"When Arthur first came to see us in September 2023, even though he looked physically strong, he could barely speak a single sentence without getting short of breath or take a few steps before having to sit down," Dr. Ankit Bharat, chief of thoracic surgery at Northwestern Medicine, said in a news release.

"The pressure inside the lungs had also increased to a point that it was causing [heart failure](#), and his only option for survival was a double-lung transplant," added Bharat, who performed Gillespie's surgery.

Gillespie has worked in law enforcement for nearly 30 years, most recently as a captain with the University of Chicago Police Department.

After discharge from hospital in 2020 following his bout with COVID, Gillespie started chemotherapy. He underwent surgery in November 2020 to have two-thirds of his right lung removed.

He intended to recover and return to work, but that never happened.

For the next three years, Gillespie received [physical therapy](#) and worked out at his home gym, but his body kept getting weaker. He wound up needing supplemental oxygen every day to get by.

"Despite my best efforts, I could feel myself going backwards. My right remaining lung was damaged from lung cancer, and my left lung was damaged from COVID," Gillespie said. His doctors at other health systems told him there was nothing more they could do for him.

Gillespie went to Northwestern University's Canning Thoracic Institute for a second opinion in September 2023. By November, he was on the list for a double-lung transplant.

Doctors say Gillespie has gotten stronger every day since his January transplant, but he isn't sure if or when he will be able to return to work as a police captain.

Gillespie hopes his story will resonate with fellow officers, so that they will prioritize their own health. The week of May 12 is National Police Week.

"My recovery from the double-lung transplant has been easier than my recovery from [lung cancer](#) surgery," Gillespie said. "I want my story to serve as a lesson to others—especially those in law enforcement."

"When you're a public servant, it's easy to become distracted with the routine of the job, Gillespie continued. "You're used to putting others

before your own health, but we have to be equally proactive and seek a second opinion when we know something isn't right."

Bharat said Gillespie has proven to be "a fighter," given that his combination of lung damage from COVID and cancer typically would be considered "non-salvageable for lung transplantation."

"Despite being told 'no' by other doctors, Arthur had the courage and determination to keep searching for answers," Bharat said. "I feel honored that we were able to help him since he spent so many years helping the community as a police captain."

More information: The University of Pennsylvania Medical Center has more on [double lung transplantation](#).

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