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A Reconstructive Surgeon with Life-Changing Solutions

Genitourinary reconstructive surgery can offer hope to men when other treatments fail. Obstructive voiding, urinary incontinence, or sexual dysfunction can resist behavioral and pharmacological therapies, and yet, fellowship-trained surgeons who can manage these complex cases are uncommon. With the arrival of Dr. Jaime Cavallo to Yale Urology, a fellowship-trained surgeon from the Lahey Clinic and the only male genitourinary reconstructive surgeon in Connecticut, her skill promises to be life-changing for patients.

“The ability to make a very dramatic improvement in a patient’s quality of life” is why Dr. Cavallo chose genitourinary reconstructive surgery. “There are many aspects of these genitourinary disorders, whether they be urinary or sexual or both, that can be debilitating and even embarrassing to the patient. And so, for me, it’s a privilege to discuss these very personal issues with patients, address their concerns, and offer them potentially life-changing solutions.”

“A physician must be able to engage patients in that discussion, to help them to feel comfortable talking about it, and to encourage them to be honest and open in their communication about these issues. The more information patients share with me, the more individualized a care plan I can make for them,” she said.

Men, and sometimes their partners, usually have many questions and concerns when they inquire about reconstructive surgery. The types of urologic disorders
Dr. Cavallo treats include urethral strictures, urinary incontinence, Peyronie’s disease, erectile dysfunction, and buried penis. Ultimately, Dr. Cavallo knows that for her elite skills to make a difference, she has to help her patients navigate their options.

"Patients with severe erectile dysfunction often feel embarrassed and disconnected from their partner. Their self-esteem declines. Some may not respond to pharmaceutical therapy and this can exacerbate how they feel," she said. "It’s really gratifying to know that you can offer a procedure that, for even the most refractory cases, can allow them to have erections again. In doing so, they can reestablish connections with their partner and their quality of life improves dramatically and fairly immediately.”

Among the specialized procedures Dr. Cavallo provides to patients is urethroplasty, a definitive treatment for urethral strictures. Urethral strictures are narrowing of the urethra from scar tissue that can make it difficult and painful to urinate. This scar tissue can be the result of prior interventions, inflammation, infection, injury, or other causes. The most common treatments are endoscopic procedures, such as urethral dilation and direct vision internal urethrotomy (DVIU), and patient-reported outcomes. Only then can treatment options be placed in the context of a patient’s personal goals of care.

Dr. Cavallo believes that the treatments should be compared with respect to cost as well as effectiveness using both objective measurements and patient-reported outcomes. Only then can treatment options be placed in the context of a patient’s personal goals of care.

When Dr. Daniel Petrylak graduated from medical school in 1985, there was little to offer in the way of chemotherapy to patients with genitourinary cancers. "For bladder cancer, there was no effective treatment," he recalled. Likewise, oncologists struggled to find treatments that were effective against prostate cancer. Three years later, as a fellow at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, it was Dr. Alan Yagoda, acclaimed oncologist and researcher, who steered his mentee, Dr. Petrylak, towards research in prostate cancer. His influence made a career in medical oncology with a focus on genitourinary cancers particularly appealing.

“You work in areas where there’s a need, and that’s one of the reasons why I chose prostate cancer initially,” he said. “The population is aging, and there weren’t a lot of effective treatments. The need for research and advances was really apparent.”

Years later, in 2012, Dr. Petrylak brought his expertise in genitourinary (GU) cancers to Yale. He is a leader in drug development and has played a major role in identifying new chemotherapy agents that are getting better results for patients with prostate, bladder, and other cancers. His wide-ranging role at Yale as Professor of Urology and of Medicine and co-director of the Cancer Signaling Networks Research Program at Yale Cancer Center, allows for the opportunity to pursue research with the hope and excitement of new discoveries and new cures. One of the most important meetings of the week for Dr. Petrylak is when the Genitourinary Tumor Board convenes, a multispecialty group of physicians who work together to develop care plans for complex patient cases. He views a multidisciplinary approach to GU malignancies as critical to personalized patient care, but the consultations do not end then.

Dr. Petrylak’s patient schedule is frequently comprised of international patients from across Europe and the Middle East who fly to the U.S. for a consultation. His international role in