

A Kidney Cancer Diary: Brandy Verdin Stands in Her Faith

Brandy Verdin, 49, a retired personal trainer and fitness nutrition specialist and mother of two adult children, lives with her husband in Gray, Louisiana. She was diagnosed with Stage IV renal cell carcinoma in May 2023.

December 9, 2024 As told to [Kate Ferguson](#)

April 2023

I was at the gym and went to the restroom to urinate and felt something like a pressure. When I looked in the toilet, I saw what looked like a bloody worm and took a picture of it. I thought it was a parasite. I was in the best shape of my entire life and didn't feel sick. Increasingly, after going to the bathroom, I'd notice little blood clots in the toilet. I started to feel weak. I thought I was anemic, so I went to my general practitioner and showed her the picture. She said, "I think you have either kidney or bladder cancer." I told her cancer doesn't run in my family. She referred me to a urologist. My labs showed that my hemoglobin was 7.5 grams/deciliter at the time. [The normal range for women is 12 to 16 g/dL.]

On April 25, my first and only granddaughter was born. It was a joyous time in our family. The next day, the urologist told me at my appointment, "I believe you have kidney or bladder cancer, but it's treatable so don't freak out."

May 2023

On May 1, the urologist sent me for a CT scan and full blood panel. I wasn't worried at all. I had the CT scan at 8 a.m. I kept my appointment for a facial. I got home a little after five and pulled up the portal for the hospital and read my CT scan. I had a 14-by-13-by-11-centimeter tumor [5.5-by-5-by-4 inches; about the size of a large grapefruit] on my left kidney that had metastasized to both lungs.

I let my children know and called my husband. I told him to come home from work. I thought no matter what I was facing, I was going to trust God.

The next day I met with the urologist. He said there was nothing he could do and sent me to his surgeon friend at Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans. After that, everything happened quickly.

By May 5, I had an appointment with the surgeon. He and a medical oncologist there tried to get me approved for surgery. But the tumor board declined my case, saying I would never survive surgery, so the medical oncologist developed a treatment plan to start me on immunotherapy and targeted therapy. [Editor's note: Sometimes drugs can shrink tumors enough to make surgery possible.]

Before we could start, my hemoglobin count plummeted. I was hospitalized for two days and given two pints of blood. They didn't think I was going to make it, but I did. My son had a wedding shower, and I pleaded with my doctors to let me go. They said it might be one of the last events I would have with my family, so I was allowed to go. I was determined to see my son get married in November.

Brandy Verdin, second from right, at her son's November 2023 wedding

Courtesy of Brandy Verdin

June 2023

When all this started, I was in the middle of seeing a holistic doctor. On June 1, some of the tests she did came back, and I did indeed have a parasite. On June 15, I was treated for that with oral

medications, and I also started the immunotherapy and targeted therapy regimen. Fortunately, the terrible side effects they predicted didn't happen. I did really well on the therapy.

July-August 2023

Everything went well. I went back to the gym and started weight lifting and sprinting again. In August, a CT scan showed that the cancer was stable.

September-October 2023

In late September, I again noticed bleeding. I didn't know if it was coming from the urethra or vagina. In October, I developed a tumor near my urethra, so I had to have surgery. The doctors believed it was because the treatment was no longer working. I had surgery on October 17. The surgeon told me she wasn't sure she would be able to remove it, so I prayed. They told my husband I would be in surgery for two hours, but the procedure lasted 11 minutes. When the surgeon went to remove the tumor, it just fell off, so they sutured the site.

In late October, I began oral treatment with a new targeted therapy drug at a dosage of 60 milligrams. I was on that for 10 days, but it was too strong. They lowered the dose to 40 mg, and that worked well.

November-December 2023

On November 7, I met with the surgeon who was supposed to do the kidney surgery. He said, "The cancer that you have is really bad. I'm sorry to tell you this, but you'll never have surgery." I told him I saw myself walking down that hallway after surgery. I believed it was going to happen. I continued the targeted therapy through November and December.

January 2024

In January, a CT scan showed that not only was the tumor stable but it had shrunk. There was no new metastasis. I was going to the gym and just living my best life, taking my medicine and standing in faith.

April 2024

My physique had returned, and I was modeling for a fitness apparel line. After another scan showed I was still stable, the medical oncologist said we would talk with the surgeon. She told me, "You are in a different place right now. I believe you're a candidate for surgery." The surgeon ordered an MRI and said, "I can't believe this. Let's do surgery."

Since I was already in chemopause [chemo-induced menopause], I asked if I could have a hysterectomy because of the possible threat to more parts from metastasis.

May 2024

On May 15, my surgery lasted about nine hours. I didn't wake up in recovery until seven that night. My family was a nervous wreck.

One of the hardest things I faced about possibly losing my life was thinking of my husband and the mourning that he and my children would go through. I didn't want to inflict pain on them.

The great thing was I woke up breathing on my own, not on a ventilator. My kidney [and tumor] was removed. Eight lymph nodes were removed, four of which had cancer in them. The other four were close to other sites in my body, and my left adrenal gland was removed. Doctors had also repaired my inferior vena cava [the large vein that carries oxygen-depleted blood from the lower body up to the heart] because the cancer had intruded there, and they performed a total hysterectomy.

The one complication that occurred healed on its own. But I was put on a no-fat diet for two weeks.

During recovery, I walked for two minutes five times a day. At week six, I was walking for 30 minutes. By week 10, I was back in the gym and had begun lifting weights again. I felt like I had a brand-new body and felt on top of the world.

August 2024

At the end of August, 14 weeks post-op, I saw the surgeon and learned that I had a 6 cm tumor [2.4 inches, the size of an egg] on my bladder.

September-October 2024

When September began, I started two new targeted therapy drugs. I continued training in the gym, praying through some excruciating pains. When I have pain-free days and nights, I thank God. I'm standing in faith that I will be healed, so I'm going to trust God.

Editor's note: It is with great sadness that we report Brandy Verdin died August 14, 2025, at age 50. Her bright spirit and memory will no doubt continue to inspire others long into the future.