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# MERIDIAN Health views

SEPTEMBER/  
OCTOBER  
2015

## Part of the Team

**Jersey Shore University Medical Center**

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# Part of the Team

**Meridian Health** *Meridian Health is a home away from home for this world traveler.*

For 84-year-old Vince Higgins, traveling has always been a big part of his life. Whether it's for work or pleasure, he and his wife, Joan, enjoy embracing different cultures. The retired Brielle residents also visit their five children and 11 grandchildren, who are scattered across the country, as often as they can.



**Alexander L. Shifrin, M.D.**  
Board certified in  
General Surgery  
Neptune  
800-560-9990

In 2012, they embarked on a different kind of journey. Vince began to have difficulties swallowing and decided that he should seek care immediately and visit their Meridian primary care physician, **Christian Kaunzinger, M.D.** After an MRI revealed something suspicious in his neck, Dr. Kaunzinger referred Vince to **Alexander Shifrin, M.D.**, an endocrine surgeon at Jersey Shore University Medical Center and part of **Meridian Cancer Care**.

"Dr. Shifrin performed a sonogram, and I remember him having this look of intense concentration," Vince says. "I had a feeling that what he was discovering wasn't good news, but his intensity showed his deep and personal concern for me, as if I was a family member or a close friend."

"I discovered Vince had a left-sided thyroid mass and left-sided neck lymphadenopathy, which means that his lymph nodes were abnormal in size, number, and consistency," Dr. Shifrin says. "I suspected that it was a serious problem and most likely thyroid cancer." After a few more tests, it was determined that Vince not only had thyroid tumors, but that several of his lymph nodes were affected and that the

disease metastasized to his liver and mediastinum (the middle section of the chest cavity).

## A Multi-disciplinary Team Right by His Side

Vince and Joan kept a positive outlook. "This may not have been the party that we'd hoped for, but we might as well dance," Vince says. "My entire medical team made my diagnosis much easier to accept."

Vince's care team included Dr. Shifrin; Vince's oncologist, **Peter Mencil, M.D.**; his endocrinologist, **Sunil Asnani, M.D.**; and radiation oncologist, **Nathan Kaufman, M.D.**

The team immediately presented Vince's case at Meridian Cancer Care's multi-disciplinary conference. "These conferences provide the opportunity for Meridian cancer experts from different specialties to assess and develop a customized treatment plan for each patient," explains Dr. Mencil.

The team determined that Vince would need a combination of surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Vince also underwent genomic testing, a medical test that helped Dr. Mencil develop a treatment tailored to Vince's needs. As a retired nurse, Joan appreciated the coordination of care that her husband received. "It's important that all doctors are on the same page, and each one of Vince's doctors communicated closely with one another. That makes a huge difference. We never had to worry. Everything was seamless," Joan says.

## VIDEO: Building HOPE



Whether it was for work or leisure, Vince was always traveling, but a cancer diagnosis grounded him. Luckily, Vince got world-class cancer care close to home. Watch him and his wife, Joan, tell their inspiring story at [MeridianCancerCareNJ.com](http://MeridianCancerCareNJ.com).

## The Advantages of Care That's Close to Home

Joan's extensive clinical background provided her the confidence in the Meridian Cancer Care team. "We chose Meridian because Jersey Shore is a teaching hospital, which ultimately means that they are up-to-date in the latest treatments," Joan says. "We were comfortable, and I knew that Vince was going to be safe and well cared for."

Vince received care from several Meridian Health hospitals. Dr. Shifrin performed his surgery at Jersey Shore, Dr. Kaufman performed his CyberKnife® treatment at Riverview Medical Center, and Vince had chemotherapy near his home at Ocean Medical Center. As Joan explains, "Looking back, it's been quite a journey. When you think about all the tests and procedures Vince has had, it would have been so exhausting and would have taken so much out of him if we'd had to keep traveling into the city."

Several months later, Vince received the great news that his liver was clear and that the small cancer in his mediastinum had stabilized and would be closely monitored moving forward. Meridian Cancer Care experts have been able to manage his condition and allow Vince to get back to his life. When they aren't traveling, they are frequent attendees at Meridian Cancer Care's monthly thyroid cancer support group, sharing their journey and serving as a positive influence for newly diagnosed patients.

"Meridian has been like a second home for us, and the doctors and nurses at all the hospitals have been like family to us. We've given God a lot of thanks, but we certainly include the Meridian team in our prayers," Vince says.

*By Kris Tranquilino*





Vince Higgins and his wife, Joan, love to travel and are happy to be planning their next trip, thanks to the expert care Vince received for thyroid cancer.