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One Woman's Journey with
Plastic Surgeon Mark Barlow, M.D

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Teamwork Makes the Dream Work



Dr. Barlow and his team are wearing pink to stand in the gap for Rhonda and all of their patients as we Race for the Cure. Pictured are: Mark Andersson, IT; Gabriella Ferrill, photographer; Erin Jamarillo, receptionist; Rhonda, our patient; Christie Chaffin, patient coordinator; Nicole Murphy, Board Certified Hair Color Expert and Stylist; Eileen Howell Barlow, Team Leader and Marketing Director; Dr. Mark Barlow

“We are at your service!” Those were the words I kept hearing over and over again, and their actions said it even louder! My journey with Dr. Barlow and his team began almost three years ago. Eileen, the patient coordinator was so warm, caring, and patient. I could tell that she was experienced with helping others, like me, navigate their way through creating change. She walked me through the process and I felt any intimidation melt away. Because of our initial email contact and telephone conversations I felt like I was among friends. Even though my time in the waiting room was short (they faxed me my paperwork ahead of time), as I sipped the Pellegrino they offered me and felt myself enveloped by the down filled sofa, I began to appreciate my surroundings. The walls were the most soothing blue, it made me feel as though I were in the middle of a water color painting. The spa like music and calming lavender aromatherapy were subtle and relaxing. If things couldn’t get any better, I looked at the table and saw a silver tray with chocolates! I could have just stayed there! I forgot that I was about to disrobe, put on a gown and display what I considered my flaws. I knew a great deal of thought had gone into creating a soothing environment for my comfort and well being.

I was promptly brought back and weighed, almost without realizing it because at that moment another patient was making arrangements

for her follow-up appointment. I witnessed a real connection between her and the staff. I also noticed how they were so careful to respect each of our privacy. As I started down the hall, the patient leaving whispered out to me, “You are going to love him, and well, everyone here!” I smiled and entered one of several exam rooms. My patient coordinator came in to visit with me as a young girl, named Lizzie, introduced herself as a high school HOSA student whom Dr. Barlow was mentoring. She asked my permission to take my blood pressure and temperature. They gave me the gown, paper panties and exited the room to give me privacy. Somehow, they were able to make an extremely clean exam room comfortable. The walls were painted that same blue, I could see the lake from the window and that beautiful music and smell was present. A light knock on the door and my patient coordinator’s head popped in and asked if I was ready. I took a deep breath. “I am,” I said! She came through the door and Dr. Barlow followed looked directly at me, gave me a smile that went all the way to his eyes and straight to my heart. He took his time getting to know me as a person and my medical history. We discussed my concerns and then he examined me. By the time I was showing him my tummy I didn’t even feel self-conscious. In his calm way, he gave me hope and realistic expectations. His precision was something I expected after reading about his engineering background.

His intelligence was something I expected after reading about his research at M.I.T. and Harvard on wound healing and scar suppression. His skill level was something I expected after reading what his peers said about him. What was so unexpected was how Dr. Barlow and his staff treated me. Prior to my consultation, they did not know that I had been around the proverbial plastic surgery block. I'd even had a previous procedure. They didn't know that I had not had the most pleasant of experiences with another plastic surgeon. They didn't know I was shopping for the best of both worlds, a plastic surgeon with tremendous skills both surgical and interpersonal. They were not trying to "win me over" to their practice they just did what they always do. My shopping was over. I had found the only plastic surgeon I would ever allow to perform a cosmetic procedure on me.


From there I went to sit with the patient coordinator who explained the process of returning for a follow-up visit. She gave me a booklet customized for me and the procedure I was undergoing. Inside of it were all of the things Dr. Barlow had discussed with me. She explained that she realized that I had been given a lot of information so "here it is in a written format so you can continue to digest more of it at home." She encouraged me to mark it up and write down all of the questions so I could ask them at my next visits. She asked me if I wanted to schedule a date for my surgery. Like all of Dr. Barlow's patients who have come and gone before and after me, I never felt pressured. Also like them, I returned for my preoperative appointment. This was my opportunity for me and my caregiver to ask additional questions. My garments were ordered, pictures were taken, and I was once again put at ease. Next, she personally escorted me to outpatient surgery for my preoperative work up. I realized that these people were on a mission to make my experience as smooth, effortless and painless as possible. It wasn't a job for them but a calling. I always looked forward to my follow-up visits. It was at one of them that I discussed a facelift and eyelift. Dr. Barlow carefully considered my concerns, examined me and simply said, "You don't need either yet. That is down the road for you. Until then what you would benefit most from is a laser peel, a good skin care regimen, and perhaps a little BOTOX®." He was right of course. He could have just taken my money and did the facelift and eyelift but he has integrity. I knew he had MY best interest at heart first and foremost. I couldn't have asked for better results on anything he has ever done for me.

My experience with Dr. Barlow and his staff changed my life on so many levels. I was in my early 40s, in the middle of a very stressful career and I was re-evaluating my priorities. I envied their passion and vehicle to pour into the lives of others on a daily basis through their work. So, after careful thought, consideration, and prayer I made the most bold telephone call of my life. I called Eileen and told her I wanted her job. I wanted to be part of creating that "Barlow experience" for others.

I asked her advice on which classes to take and she told me. Then she would do something else that would change my life forever. She asked me my timeline and told me that she would mentor me along my way, bring me on board and add me to their team. She recognized my servant's heart and knew I could learn the details.

"I've worked here a little over a year now," says Christie Chaffin, patient coordinator. What I now know that I didn't know then was that they are equally as committed to the growth of each member of our team and to their own. I now know the entire team prays for their patients every day. I now know that on Wednesdays we hold a team meeting, opened with prayer, followed by THE QUESTIONS: How can we do better? How can we do more for our patients? We discuss each patient who is about to have surgery and those who just had surgery. We go over our checklists to make sure that every little detail was seen to. What I didn't know then was that he is one of very few plastic surgeons in private practice who accept Medicare and cares for the elderly, and TRICARE for our military. He feels he is blessed with a lucrative cosmetic practice because he cares for those for whom others choose not to. I have had to leave an exam room so that a patient wouldn't see me cry as I watched Dr. Barlow bend down and gently put the socks on an elderly patient's feet so they wouldn't have do it for themselves. We have military patients who drive over six hours to see him. He tells them, "You put your life on the line for ME you better believe I've got YOUR back." Every day I say a prayer hoping there are other plastic surgeons, or even other doctors who care as much about serving their patients.

"Holidays are our favorite time of year," says Eileen, now team leader and marketing director. "Now, more than ever, people want to add value to their lives. Instead of spending money on things they really don't need, people are investing in themselves. Our patients are investing in their husbands, wives, and children for the long-term with plastic surgery, education, IRAs and vacation/quality time with their families."

Dr. Barlow says, "If there is something about your appearance that is standing between you now and who you see yourself becoming, then invest in yourself and move forward. No one is more committed to making that experience and outcome better for you than our team. We have a saying around our office... 'Our dream is making your dream come true. We are at your service!' 

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