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L to R: Amy R. Meagan Kim, Amy E. Photographed by Dr. Jay Granzow.

IN GOOD HEALTH

WHEN HOPE CALLS

Dr. Jay Granzow and his team give patients with a challenging medical condition a new lease on life.

WRITTEN BY LAURA L. WATTS & KATHERINE CHEUNG | PHOTOGRAPHED BY JP CORDERO

“I just hated life,” says Amy R. of her school years. Born with lymphedema, which caused one leg to swell to twice the size of the other, she was taunted by kids who called her “elephant leg.” She pulled away from family and friends and made excuses to avoid social outings. But today she is living life to the fullest: “I am the mother I wanted to be, and the athlete I was told I would never be,” she shares. Similarly, Amy E. struggled with her appearance after developing lymphedema in her right leg at age 22, following surgery and radiation for Stage III melanoma. “I did not feel comfortable wearing shorts or dresses, I avoided outdoor activities in the summer and I could not be as active as I wanted to be,” says the cancer survivor, who today is confident about how she looks. She even enjoyed time at the beach this summer.

What turned things around and gave these two women hope to carry on? They both found Jay Granzow, MD, a South Bay board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon who is internationally known as

an expert in the highly specialized field of lymphedema surgery.

CHANGING LIVES

Lymphedema is a disorder of the lymphatic system that causes chronic swelling due to trauma or blockage in the lymph nodes. Left untreated, it can cause infection, disabilities and even death. While there is no cure for lymphedema, there is hope—because it can be managed. And that’s why Dr. Granzow and his team at the Lymphedema & Lipedema Center have been helping patients around the world since 2008.

Dr. Granzow, who serves as a professor of plastic surgery at UCLA and as the assistant chief of plastic surgery at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, created a first-of-its-kind lymphedema treatment system to successfully target each stage of the condition. And that’s exactly the kind of treatment patient Meagan B. needed.

“Recovery sucked, but Dr. Granzow did an amazing job and drastically changed my life,” Meagan says of her Suction Assisted

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Protein Lipectomy (SAPL) surgery. Afterwards she made the decision to move to sunny San Diego and continues to enjoy a full life there.

“I am passionate about educating patients, therapists and physicians about lymphedema,” says Dr. Granzow. He frequently lectures on the topic at medical conferences worldwide and publishes scientific articles in leading medical journals. He collaborates closely with other doctors to support much-needed research. He also engages with

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patients to generate and raise awareness to further the understanding of these diseases.

RAISING AWARENESS

His patient Amy R. started the Ninjas Fighting Lymphedema Foundation when she was told there was no cure for her condition. “I was told that I would be permanently disabled,” Amy remembers. Not accepting that answer, she started her foundation—which Dr. Granzow supports—to help make others aware of lymphedema and its challenges and to help patients who can’t afford

treatment. She says Dr. Granzow helped her fight for her life.

A cervical cancer survivor, Kimm already had practice fighting for her life when a cellulitis infection triggered lymphedema in 2015. Worried that the lymphedema would progress, she consulted her doctor, who told her to research Dr. Granzow. “The minute I started reading about Dr. Jay Granzow is the first time I felt there was any hope for a better life with this condition,” she says.

Fast-forward two years, with three lymphedema surgeries under her belt, and Kimm is

no longer living with infections. She recently traveled to South Africa to climb Table Mountain and sandboard down the Atlantic dunes. “For the first time in years, I do not feel afraid—if anything I feel stronger and more determined than ever to live a full, active and healthy life,” she says.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Dr. Granzow has amazing support from his clinical team, which includes Julie Soderberg, certified lymphedema therapist; Yvette Velasquez, insurance appeals

coordinator; Mariela Alvarez, clinic lead/patient liaison; Julie Inouye, marketing/patient outreach; and Amy Granzow, patient advocate. New to the team are Thao Messenger, clinical director/physician assistant, and Katherine “Kat” Cheung, practice manager.

Thao has practiced medicine for 15 years and has trained clinical staff and surgeons on specialized surgical equipment and procedures. Kat transitioned from retail and manufacturing to focus on health management

early in her career. “I wanted to make a difference in the lives of others,” she says.

Making a difference in the lives of their patients is the mission of each team member of the Lymphedema & Lipedema Center—and that means the world to the men and women they treat. “I will forever be grateful to Dr. Granzow and his team for not only giving me my life back but for the process in which they do things,” Kimm shares. “They are the most supportive team any patient could ask for.”

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Dr. Granzow joins patients Meagan, Kimm, Amy R., Amy E. in Manhattan Beach. Photographed by King Wong.



Dr. Granzow with his staff (L to R): Kai Cheung, Thao Messenger, Amy Granzow, Julie Inouye, Mariela Alvarez. Not pictured: Yvette Velasquez & Julie Soderberg.



Dr. Granzow and his wife, Amy Granzow.



New team members Kat Cheung and Thao Messenger.