According to the American Cancer Society, nearly half of all men and one-third of all women in the United States will develop cancer during their lifetimes. Sometimes, environmental risk factors, such as smoking, are to blame. Other times, however, cancer can be caused by abnormal genes passed from generation to generation — putting some at greater risk for inheriting cancer, despite their best preventative efforts.

The High Risk Cancer Assessment Program at Monmouth Medical Center was designed to evaluate, educate and closely monitor those at risk for developing cancer — whether due to environmental factors and lifestyle choices or family and medical history, such as in the case of the Kim Martis and Lisa Karen — sisters who had a significant family history of specific cancers and, unbeknownst to them, shared a genetic disorder known as Lynch Syndrome.

When younger sister Kim, of Brick, then 43, was diagnosed with stress urinary incontinence, she saw a urologist who performed a vaginal sling procedure. However, shortly after the procedure, Kim began experience bleeding. The urologist determined that the mesh needed to be repaired and Kim returned to the operating room for a partial removal of the sling. During the procedure, something fell out of her uterus and was biopsied.

Following the biopsy, Kim was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. She was referred to Thomas Hackett, D.O., chief of gynecological oncology at Monmouth Medical Center, who performed a robotic hysterectomy and removed lymph nodes. She was diagnosed with Stage IIIA Grade III endometrial adenocarcinoma — uterine cancer.

At stage IIIA, a patient’s cancer has spread to the outer lining of the uterus, fallopian tubes or ovaries or there are cells in the fluid that surrounds the uterus in the pelvic area. As a result, Kim’s treatment also included chemotherapy and radiation.

While watching and supporting Kim through her cancer diagnosis and treatment, older sister Lisa saw her own gynecologist and requested a uterine biopsy as a precautionary measure, as a woman’s regular Pap...