

Patient Advocate Corner

Falling Through the Cracks: Young Adults and Cancer— The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults



Doug Ulman

“The most important support I needed after my cancer diagnosis was to simply talk to other young adults who understood.”

—Doug Ulman

29 years old

Three-time cancer survivor

From College Student to Cancer Survivor

Imagine . . . age 19, a healthy, active Division I college student athlete, in the prime of his life.

One event would change his life

forever. During a routine jog, he began having problems breathing, something that was not unusual since he had suffered from asthma as a child . . . but this was different.

Flat on his back, sliding through a computed tomography scanner, Doug Ulman could see the technician out of the corner of his eye, pointing to something on a computer screen. The realization came quickly—something was wrong. It turned out that a growth the size of two golf balls was wedged in the space between his spine, ribs, and lungs. And instantly, three words changed the course of his life.

“You have cancer.”

From a college student to a cancer patient his mind ran wild . . . “What is chondrosarcoma? Who do I talk to? Where do I get treatment? Do I have insurance? Will I still be able to have kids? Do I have to drop out of school? Can I still play sports? Will my friends understand? Do young adults get cancer? Are there organizations out there to help me? What is a cancer survivor?”

About Young Adults and Cancer

In dealing with his illness, Doug and his family quickly learned that he was not alone. Over 70,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 40 are diagnosed with cancer each year.

Cancer affects young adults in a unique way. In the natural course of life, young adults go forth with optimism, idealism, and a belief that they are indestructible. When they are robbed of that special perspective because of a life threatening disease, they have a particularly difficult adjustment to make. There are issues that are very specific to young adults dealing with cancer, such as practical and emotional issues of independence, insurance and finances, fertility, dating and intimacy, interruption of education and/or career, and loss of optimism and hope.

Although cancer is disruptive at any age, certain issues are magnified for young adults, who, on the curve of a lifetime, are at a critical stage *of becoming*. Young adults have fallen

through the cracks when addressing treatment, clinical research, resources, and support services. Furthermore, of the more than 400 cancer patient advocate groups in the country, very few focus solely on young adult cancer survivors.

About the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults

Frustrated by the lack of support programs or literature directed at the needs of young adults affected by cancer, Doug and his family created the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults (UCF) to fill the void that exists in health care services. Since its inception in 1997, the UCF has supported, educated, and connected more than 50,000 young adults affected by cancer, by dedicating more than \$1 million to develop and deliver quality programs all across the country. Its work is fulfilled through its stated mission—to provide support programs, education and resources, free of charge, to benefit young adults, their families, and friends, who are affected by cancer, and to promote awareness and prevention of cancer.

In less than a decade, UCF has grown from a small, local nonprofit to an organization with national programs that reach thousands of young adults annually, touching individuals, families, and cancer centers in all 50 US states. In 2005, UCF impacted young adults and families living with cancer in communities across the country through the following:

- Award of 22 college scholarships to survivors in Albany, New York; Bertram, Texas; Cedar City, Utah; Garden City, New Jersey; Bowling Green, Ohio; Carthage, Texas; Garwood, New Jersey; Haines, Arkansas; Hindsboro, Illinois; Joppa, Maryland; Las Vegas, Nevada; Moorhead, Minnesota; Mt Laurel, New Jersey; New York, New York; Pasadena, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; Rochester, New York; Roslindale, Massachusetts; Rutgers, New Jersey; Seattle, Washington; and Waco, Texas
- Distribution of over 10,000 copies of “NO WAY, IT CAN’T BE!” to cancer centers and individuals in all 50 states
- Funding of six support and networking groups

UCF also hosts a toll-free number that serves as a clearinghouse and resource for more than 5,000 young adults annually, and a Web site at www.ulmancancerfund.org that features an online community that hundreds of young adults visit daily.

Get Involved

Whether it’s volunteering, emailing with another survivor, or participating in a triathlon or marathon to raise funds for their programs, UCF has a place to use your energy. Call or e-mail now to get involved: 888-393-FUND or info@ulmancancerfund.org.