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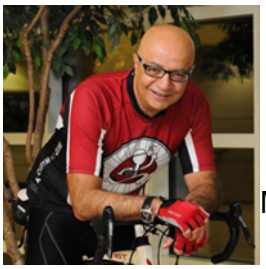
Rafat Abonour, MD [1]



Many doctors go the extra mile for their patients. Few go more than 1,000.For the past eight years, Rafat Abonour, MD?a clinical researcher focusing on multiple myeloma at Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center in Indianapolis?has gone the extra 1,400 miles for his patients. Every fall since 2005, Dr. Abonour has set off on a two-day trek called Miles for Myeloma. He and a pack of around 20 cyclists crisscross the state of Indiana, traveling several hundred miles to raise awareness of and funding for multiple myeloma research. To date, he has helped raise more than $1.75 million.

Miles for Myeloma began when a group of Dr. Rafat Abonour?s patients wanted to organize a bike/run/walk event to raise funds for myeloma research at Indiana University. Rather than have his patients plan a standard participatory event, Dr. Abonour offered to cover the miles ?and the state of Indiana ?himself. He reasoned that as his patients travel from all parts of Indiana to visit him for appointments, he should make an effort to go to them. Dr. Abonour said, ?Well, the 5K, everyone does that....You guys come to me from all over Indiana for a second opinion, so why don?t I come to you. But instead of driving there, I will run.?

For the first four years, the event consisted of a day-long run and day-long bike ride. However, the run proved too draining on the participants and equally as draining on the volunteers due to the sheer distance of the event. ?When we started to do the 200- and 250-mile trips, it was hard to fit the run in, so that?s why the last couple of years have been only bike riding.?

Dr. Abonour is an avid runner and marathoner, however, he says, ?You can?t just decide to ride 100+ miles. Serious training is a necessity and you spend basically your whole summer training. If I?m not on call, I?m pretty much on the road getting ready.? The hours it takes to train and the effort it takes to keep the group safe during the actual ride are the biggest challenges. ?When we?re riding together, we?re riding on public roads and we don?t have a police escort the whole way. We have different levels of abilities among the riders, so it?s tough to keep the group together. The other riders make fun of me because I?m shouting, ?Stay on the right! Stay on the

right!? the whole way.?

For Dr. Abonour, the most rewarding part of the journey is the camaraderie the event generates. ?We get an RV every year, and the beauty of the RV is that every 20-25 miles we stop, our volunteers put food and water out, and it becomes a mobile aid station for the riders. It?s a great sight. It?s a time for getting together, talking to the patients, talking to the families of patients, remembering the people who have passed away. Every 25 miles we have a moment of reflection on someone who was a patient of ours and their journey, and we ride in their memories. The group uniting together is an amazing thing. Everyone looks forward to coming back every year because of those two days of friendship. There?s hardship and reflection, but also memories.?

Rafat Abonour, MD*is Associate Dean of Clinical Research and Professor at the Indiana University School of Medicine. He is also Director of the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center Adult Clinical Research Office and is a member of ASCO?s Scientific Program Committee. His clinical interests include multiple myeloma and hematopoietic stem cell processing, including gene therapy.*

Links:
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