Printed December 8, 2013 from http://www.cancer.net/advocacy-and-policy/patient-advocacy-and-asco/advocate-and-survivor-voices/patient-advocate-guest-columns-and-podcasts/can%E2%80%99t-stomach-cancer-providing-hope-and-support-people-stomach-cancer

Can?t Stomach Cancer: Providing Hope and Support to People with Stomach Cancer

Editor's Note: This is part of a series of Patient Advocate Guest Columns and Podcasts, launched as a forum for patient advocates to address a topic, issue, or trend within the cancer community through Cancer.Net, the patient information website of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

Can?t Stomach Cancer: Providing Hope and Support to People with Stomach Cancer

A patient advocate guest column by: Bonnie Ross, Patient Resource Education Program (PREP) Coordinator

Debbie Zelman, Can?t Stomach Cancer's [1] (CSC) President and Founder, was diagnosed with Stage IV advanced, incurable stomach cancer in April 2008. At that time she was forty years old, the mother of three young children, married to a physician, and a practicing attorney with her own firm, was only expected to live a few weeks. Debbie began the fight of her life. She had a port placed and began a very aggressive chemotherapy regimen. She spent months in bed, doctors? offices, and hospitals.

Debbie?s Dream

In May 2008, while undergoing treatment, Debbie began activities to raise funds for stomach cancer research and also began speaking with other people who had stomach cancer. It became apparent that there was a great need for a resource like CSC among patients, families, and caregivers all over the world. This was the beginning of Can?t Stomach Cancer, the first organization dedicated to helping stomach cancer patients, raising money for research, and educating the public about stomach cancer. In April 2009 Debbie incorporated the organization and immediately garnered the support of the South Florida community and soon expanded worldwide.

Today, CSC has eight chapters, an internationally renowned Medical Advisory Board, prestigious Honorary Board, dedicated Board of Directors, hundreds of volunteers, and thousands of supporters. CSC seeks as its ultimate goal to make the cure for stomach cancer a reality.

Raising Awareness about Stomach Cancer

Stomach cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men and fourth among women worldwide. Each year nearly 930,000 people worldwide are diagnosed with stomach cancer, and approximately 700,000 die of the disease. Approximately 22,000 Americans will be diagnosed with stomach cancer each year, and over 10,000 will die within a year. According to the American Cancer Society, the overall 5-year survival rate for people with stomach cancer in the United States is about 28%, and the 5-year survival rate for stage IV stomach cancer is 4%.

Awareness of stomach cancer, its symptoms, and risk factors remains low despite the fact that it is one of the deadliest cancers and the number two cancer killer in the world. Physician and public awareness are critical for early diagnosis. If people are aware of the risk factors and symptoms, they can be diagnosed at an early stage, which dramatically increases the chance of survival. Two of the most prevalent precursors to stomach and esophageal cancers are H pylori and acid reflux. To help raise awareness about stomach cancer, Debbie Zelman appeared on the Dr. Oz show in a segment titled ?The Cancer That is Eating You Alive: Stomach Cancer.? [2] She also serves on the National Cancer Institute Esophagogastric Task Force which identifies and promotes the best science in gastric, GE junction, and esophageal cancer clinical research by addressing the design and prioritization of clinical trials.

CSC?s Research and Public Policy Initiatives

Can?t Stomach Cancer continually plans and collaborates on stomach cancer awareness events including symposia with national and community level representation, educational institutions, and worldwide leading healthcare professionals. CSC was instrumental in the introduction of US House Resolution 800 which proposes to designate November 2012 as Stomach Cancer Awareness Month. There is very little research being conducted on stomach cancer for a variety of reasons, including a lack of funding and a limited number of doctors specializing in stomach cancer. Per cancer death, stomach cancer receives the least amount of federal funding of any cancer. Can?t Stomach Cancer strives to increase the treatment options available for stomach cancer patients by directly and indirectly funding stomach cancer research. CSC is committed to advancing stomach cancer research through active advocacy and action.

Providing Help and Support

A cancer diagnosis takes a huge toll on a patient's family. Can?t Stomach Cancer addresses the many issues facing people with stomach cancer, their families and caregivers. CSC is the place to turn to for help when a patient is diagnosed with stomach cancer CSC offers a Patient Resource Education Program (PREP) via a toll-free hotline for patients, families, and caregivers so they can speak with someone in a similar situation to share their stories and resources. CSC also informs patients about clinical trials and helps patients find physicians and treatment facilities. All PREP services are entirely free.

Can't Stomach Cancer: The Foundation of Debbie's Dream is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness about stomach cancer, advancing funding for research, and providing education and support internationally to patients, families, and caregivers. CSC seeks as its ultimate goal to make the cure for stomach cancer a reality.

For information about the extraordinary difference Can?t Stomach Cancer is making in the lives of people with stomach cancer, please visit www.CantStomachCancer.org [3] or call the toll-free hotline at 1-855-475-1200.

If you are a patient advocate interested in authoring a future Patient Advocate Guest Column or Podcast, please contact patientadvocates@asco.org [4] or 1-571-483-1358.

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Links:
[1] http://www.cantstomachcancer.org/
[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLSNnrKG3KQ&feature=player_embedded
[3] http://www.CantStomachCancer.org
[4] mailto:patientadvocates@asco.org