2012

Building a Legacy of Hope Against Ovarian Cancer

Follow this and additional works at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/jss

Part of the Surgery Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/jss/vol7/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jefferson Digital Commons. The Jefferson Digital Commons is a service of Thomas Jefferson University's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The Commons is a showcase for Jefferson books and journals, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, unique historical collections from the University archives, and teaching tools. The Jefferson Digital Commons allows researchers and interested readers anywhere in the world to learn about and keep up to date with Jefferson scholarship. This article has been accepted for inclusion in Jefferson Surgical Solutions by an authorized administrator of the Jefferson Digital Commons. For more information, please contact: JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu.
Building a Legacy of Hope Against Ovarian Cancer

Cancer – let alone a rare form of ovarian cancer – wasn’t on Sandy Parvin’s radar when her 11-year-old daughter Sarah was nauseous and vomiting for a few days in the spring of 2005. “Honestly, we thought she had the flu,” Sandy said. The virus had been going around so Sandy took her daughter to their family physician.

The doctor sent Sarah to the hospital to get some IV fluids. It quickly turned into a parent’s worst nightmare. Sarah was put on a heart monitor and four physicians were there asking questions. Her calcium levels were far too high.

“They did an ultrasound,” Sandy recalled. “They saw the mass on her ovary. I can tell you we were blown away. In our wildest dreams that never even entered our minds. At 11 years old, we never thought we would be told she had ovarian cancer.”

After the tumor was surgically removed, tests revealed that Sarah had an extremely rare small cell ovarian cancer with associated hypercalcemia. At the time, there were less than 300 diagnosed cases worldwide, Sandy said.

After her surgery, Sarah underwent chemotherapy. After six months of treatment, Sarah’s tests came back clear. But, in March 2006, Sarah complained that she was not feeling well again. The cancer had returned. Sarah continued to fight the disease, but when it became clear the end was near she just wanted to go home.

“We brought her home. We were able to have a big toga party with her friends. We got to see her, to laugh with her.”

“At 11 years old, we never thought we would be told she had ovarian cancer.”

Sarah was 12 years and 24 days old when she lost her battle with cancer. “The loss of a child, or anyone, to cancer is a devastation that is immeasurable. It can make you want to give up on life, or it can make you fight harder to change the outcome for others. We chose to affect change,” said Sandy.

Family and friends created the Sarah Parvin Foundation in 2007 to honor the memory of Sarah Alexandra Parvin. Each year the Foundation and the Quakertown Soccer Club hold the Sarah Parvin Memorial Soccer Fest, dubbed SarahFest – a 24-hour marathon soccer festival fundraising event. Last year, more than 200 teams participated and each year the celebration grows.

Jonathan Brody, PhD, director of the surgical research division at Jefferson, connected with the family through the American Cancer Society when he was speaking at a fundraising event in Lancaster, PA.

“He asked questions about her illness, but more about how we are fighting back,” Sandy said. “Then Dr. Brody came to SarahFest and spoke at the opening ceremonies. It took my breath away, the excitement and the interest his words generated in the kids. He told them how their fundraising would truly help make a difference.”

Dr. Brody’s research is focused on developing new approaches to fighting cancer.

“Cancer cells, including ovarian, live in stressful environments and upon treatment these cells get stressed,” he said. “We have found that a protein, HuR, is activated and puts forth a survival mechanism in ovarian cancer cells so these cells can live and thrive in these environments.”

The Brody lab is conducting research into ways to stop that process.

“We have silenced this activity in preclinical mouse models for ovarian cancer and have found that targeting HuR inhibits ovarian cancer cells.”

The funds raised by the Foundation “will allow us to further pursue these novel and promising findings,” Dr. Brody said.

The Fifth Anniversary SarahFest will be held on July 28 and 29 in Quakertown, Pa. For more information, visit www.sarahsoccer.com.