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Zhi Ven Fong, JMC '12 Secretary, Gibbon Surgical Society

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Changing Lives Through Research



Since losing her young daughter to a rare form of ovarian cancer, Sandra Parvin (second from left) has dedicated herself to raising awareness and funds to support research. On February 1, she presented a check to Stephen Smith and Lara Goldstein of the Jefferson Foundation to support the promising research being done in the laboratory of Dr. Jonathan Brody (far right).

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

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Born and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Zhi Ven Fong spent his first two years of medical school at the International Medical University (IMU) in Malaysia before coming to Philadelphia to study at Jefferson Medical College. And while medical school alone would be enough to keep most students busy, Zhi, 23, has seized every opportunity to build his skills and knowledge as a physician scientist.

"I aspire to be a leader in an academic field like surgery, so I realized I needed experience in research," Zhi says. "After consulting with senior students, I reached out to Dr. Ernest Rosato, who took me under his wing and introduced me to the rest of the faculty."

Over the past 18 months, Zhi has contributed to numerous research projects. Dr. Rosato enlisted his assistance for a paper analyzing the outcomes of combined hepatic arterial embolization and liver ablation – two novel therapies for metastatic colorectal cancers to the liver. Together with Dr. Harish Lavu, Zhi is examining outcomes of extended resection involving other organs for advanced pancreatic cancer. With Dr. Jordan Winter, he's working on a detailed study examining how CT scan findings of pancreatic cancer correlate with clinicopathologic outcomes. Meanwhile, he's joining Dr. Jonathan Brody in studying biological receptors with the potential to therapeutically target pancreatic cancer.

200 teams participated and each year the celebration grows.

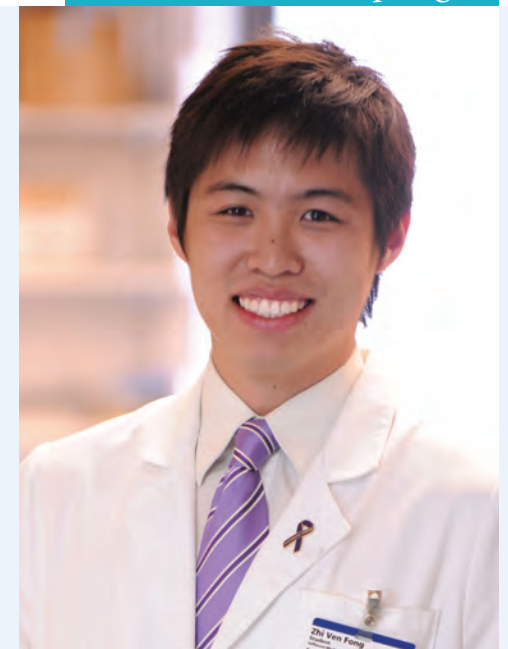
Jonathan Brody, PhD, director of the surgical research division at Jefferson, connected with the family through the American Cancer Society when he was speaking at a fundraising event in Lancaster, PA.

"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

Student Spotlight



"As you can see, the scope of my research is broad, but at this early stage, it helps me keep an open mind about where I eventually want to focus," Zhi says, adding that the faculty members have served not just as academic guides, but also as invaluable life mentors.

"Research has helped me build relationships with my mentors and cultivate the mindset of the physician scientist," he notes. "I've learned how to ask good research questions, collaborate, analyze data and write papers – skills essential for anyone seeking to advance the field of surgery and fight the good battle against cancer."

On March 16, Zhi matched into the General Surgery Residency Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School.

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.