

SIDNEY KIMMEL COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER

**Pancreatic Cancer  
and Related Diseases Programs**  
2025 UPDATE



Jefferson

# Pancreatic Cancer and Related Diseases Multidisciplinary Team

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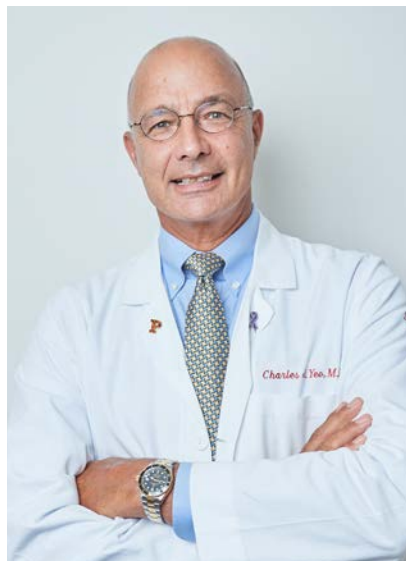
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## Dear Friend:

Reflecting on my 20 years at Jefferson, I am struck by how much we've achieved together. From a small group of survivors attending our first symposium to last year's event—welcoming over 250 patients, families, caregivers, researchers, clinicians, benefactors, and advocates—we've built an incredible community together over the past two decades.

United in purpose, we have been tirelessly working towards improving the

survival rate for pancreatic cancer to give our patients more quality time with their loved ones. Discovery is foundational to this objective, and from the bench to the bedside, our researchers in the Pancreas, Biliary and Related Cancer Center are making breakthroughs that are transforming every aspect of pancreatic cancer care. I am deeply grateful to lead a Center comprised of many of the field's foremost thought leaders, supported by generous partners whose commitment has been vital to such work.

Philanthropic support to our research program has never been more important than it is today. The increasing competitiveness and ever-changing, uncertain climate of research funding is presenting unique challenges. At Jefferson and across the nation, researchers are facing unanticipated gaps in funding, which has the potential to delay meaningful progress and discovery. Innovation is at the core of who we are here at Jefferson. Across our entire enterprise, we are strategizing ways to ensure we can continue making the breakthroughs our community needs.

The following pages highlight just a few of the ways our community has come together to support one another and transform the healthcare journey for our patients. If you feel inspired by this work, I invite you to support whichever aspect of these lifesaving efforts resonates with you.

Together, we are building a more hopeful world for our patients—one discovery, one surgery, one gift, and one connection at a time.

Sincerely,

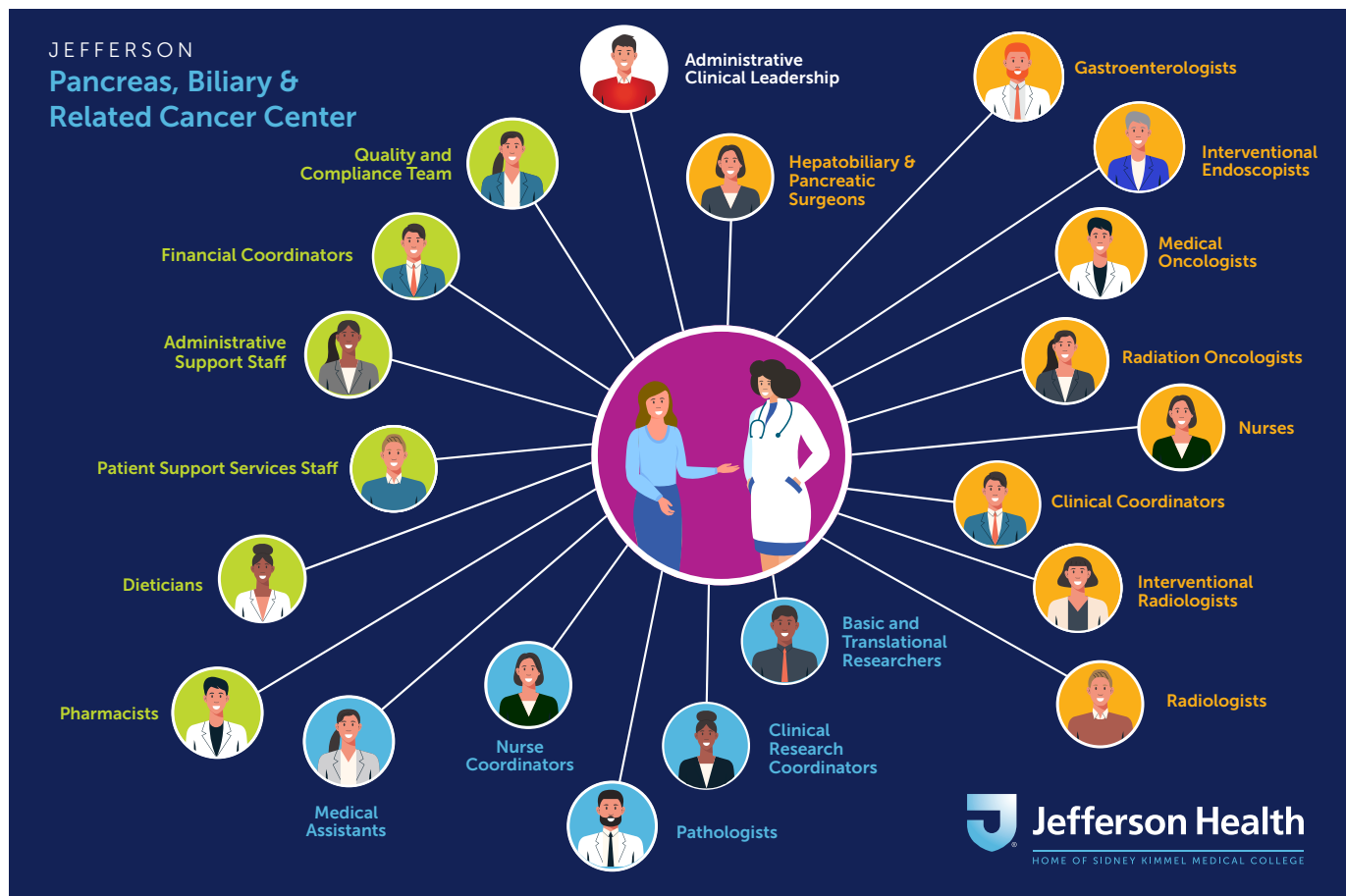
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles J. Yeo".

**Charles J. Yeo, MD, FACS**

8th Samuel D. Gross Professor and Chair of Surgery  
Senior Vice President and Chair,  
Enterprise Surgery, Jefferson Health  
Co-Director, Pancreas, Biliary and Related Cancer Center



## A DESTINATION OF CARE



The Pancreas, Biliary and Related Cancer Center is a multidisciplinary hub of dedicated experts across specialties and the highest-volume center for pancreas-related surgeries in the tristate region. Each year, we perform more than 200 pancreatic resections, including 120 Whipple procedures and other more minimally invasive treatments. In the past year, for instance, we launched a Radiotheranostics Program, led by Dr. Jessie DiNome, that provides LUTATHERA®—an alternative to chemotherapy that targets a specific receptor in the tumor through a combination of infusions and radiation—for patients with pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors.

Bringing together social workers and financial coordinators to psychiatrists and dieticians, we take a holistic approach to care by providing patients with the comprehensive services they need to best navigate their cancer diagnosis. Through these dedicated efforts, we are:

- **1 of 57** NCI-Comprehensive Cancer Centers in the nation
- In the **top 2%** of highest-performing cancer centers in the nation for clinical trials
- **31<sup>st</sup>** in Gastroenterology & GI Surgery by *U.S. News & World Report*
- Marked as **High Performing** in cancer care by *U.S. News & World Report*
- **67<sup>th</sup>** best in cancer care in the world and **52<sup>nd</sup>** in America by *Newsweek*

While rankings and accolades can be imperfect markers of success, they do reflect something real: we are at the vanguard of pancreatic cancer care, defining best practices on a national scale.

In June 2025, the American Surgical Association—the oldest and most prestigious U.S. surgical association—named Dr. Charles J. Yeo its vice president. Co-director of the Center, Dr. Yeo has performed over 1,950 Whipple procedures and treated over 3,000 patients with pancreatic and related cancers. Such recognition reflects Dr. Yeo’s leading presence in the field, transforming surgical practices at Jefferson and across the nation.

**“This is particularly meaningful to me since the organization was founded by Jefferson’s Dr. Samuel D. Gross in 1880, and Dr. John H. Gibbon Jr.—a past holder of the Gross Professorship and well known as the inventor of the heart-lunch machine—served as its president roughly 70 years ago.”**

**Dr. Charles J. Yeo**

## SPOTLIGHT: DIVISION OF SURGICAL ONCOLOGY



**“The evidence increasingly shows that the sequence and timing of different types of treatment matter to patient outcomes. I often summarize this as follows: Decisions are more important than incisions. This axiom applies to how we are orchestrating the impressive cancer surgery resources across the Jefferson enterprise. Strong linkages across specialties and locations leads to better patient care.”**

**Nader Hanna, MD, FACS, FSSO**

Professor of Surgery  
Chief of Surgical Oncology

In January 2024, the Center grew with the launch of the **Division of Surgical Oncology**, led by Dr. Nader Hanna. By bringing our surgical oncology specialties under a single division, our clinicians will be better positioned to drive critical scientific discoveries, standardize best practices across our 32-hospital enterprise, expand multidisciplinary evaluations, and increase patients’ access to clinical trials—all which are essential to improving patient outcomes. Exemplifying the collaborative nature of the Center, this new division promises to elevate the quality of pancreatic cancer care we can provide across the region.

Dr. Hanna comes to Jefferson from the University of Maryland, where he was the chief and director of clinical operations in the Division of General & Oncology Surgery. In 2022, he was inducted into the Academy of Master Surgeon Educators, one of the highest honors awarded by the American College of Surgeons, and he has been in the top 1% of doctors in *U.S. News & World Report*.

## CREATING HOPE

***Research is the driving force of healthcare, establishing the treatments, protocols, and guidance that give our patients an improved quality of life and more time with their loved ones.***

Today's care is built upon yesterday's discoveries—of past researchers pursuing new avenues of inquiry, collaborating across specialties, and publishing their findings for the larger scientific community to utilize. Such scientific research has impacted every aspect of a pancreatic cancer diagnosis and treatment, and investigators are continuing to unlock new ways to determine risk factors, detect tumors, predict recurrence, and develop new drugs and therapies, as well as refine surgery.

While the five-year relative survival rate has nearly doubled in the past decade, from 7% to 13%, pancreatic cancer remains the only major cancer with a survival rate below 20%. At Jefferson, investigators are taking a comprehensive, multipronged approach to improve survival rates and offer hope to those affected by this challenging cancer. From basic science, like Dr. Aditi Jain's work uncovering new therapeutic strategies through DNA repair proteins, to clinical trials led by Dr. Babar Bashir, which provide patients access to experimental treatments while shaping future standards of care, our team is advancing progress one discovery at a time.

## SPOTLIGHT:

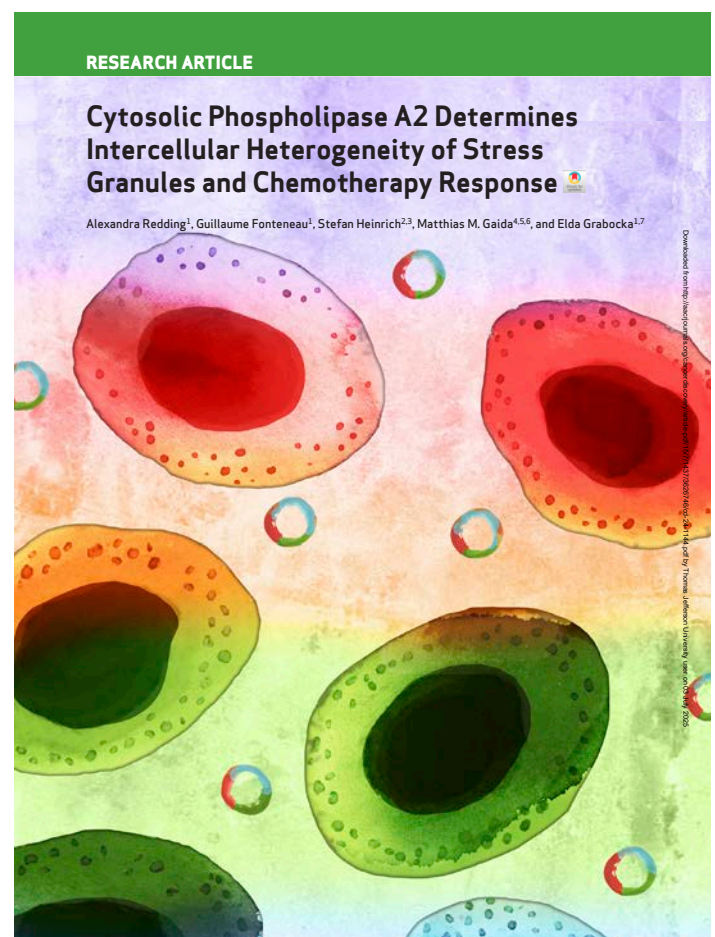
### RESEARCH IN THE PANCREAS, BILIARY AND RELATED CANCER CENTER

#### PREVENTING TUMOR GROWTH

Supported by a W. Kim Foster Pancreatic Cancer Pilot Grant and more recently the Gail V. Coleman and Kenneth M. Bruntel Foundation, Dr. Elda Grabocka's investigations look at blocking the formation of stress granules—structures that make pancreatic cancer cells resistant to chemotherapy and promote pancreatic tumor growth—which can reduce cancer growth by up to 50% in mouse models. To advance this research, the team is exploring when and where stress granules develop to determine ways to prevent tumor growth and eliminate chemotherapy-resistant cells at the source.

They discovered that pancreatic cancer cells often activate at the "G2 checkpoint" during the cell cycle, triggering the formation of stress granules that make the cells resistant to DNA-damaging chemotherapeutics. By targeting the "G2 checkpoint" to block stress granules formation, pancreatic tumors can become more responsive to certain chemotherapeutics. These crucial findings were published in a May 2025 Cancer Discovery article (see right image), one of the top two cancer journals worldwide.

**The patient impact:** This research identifies a precise target to prevent further pancreatic tumor growth and improve the effectiveness of chemotherapy.



## REPURPOSING APPROVED THERAPIES

Inspired by their previous 2017 study that showed pyrvinium pamoate (PP), an old drug used to treat pinworm infections, had surprising effectiveness against pancreatic cancer, Dr. Avinoam Nevler and Dr. Harish Lavu launched a study focused on dithiazanine iodide. Similar to PP but more easily absorbed into the bloodstream, mouse models showed that dithiazanine iodide was even more effective than PP at targeting cancerous cells while protecting normal cells. Unlike traditional chemotherapy that kills cells by causing DNA damage, dithiazanine iodide disrupts cancer cell metabolism. To build on these findings, the team has partnered with Dr. Juan-Carlos Morales, a medicinal chemist in Spain, to modify this once-obsolete drug, enhancing its bioavailability and targeting capabilities. This initial research was supported by the Department of Surgery Pilot Grant Program and other philanthropic sources.

**The patient impact:** This research has the potential to create a new therapeutic option to traditional chemotherapy that does not cause the same level of DNA damage to healthy cells.

## DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PANCREATIC TUMORS

Launched in 2022 and led by Hien T. Dang, PhD, the Jefferson Molecular Profiling of Pancreatic Cancer program is sequencing tumors to create a clearer picture about pancreatic cancer's molecular structure—revealing biomarkers, structural patterns, and possible vulnerabilities. Such work helps us recognize new therapeutic targets, which have the potential to lead to future drug development and deepens our understanding of how tumors respond to treatment. As of June 2025, we have enrolled over 1,000 patients in our tumor registry, profiled over 180 patients, and are working to incorporate genomic data. Thanks to donor support, we can offer sequencing to all surgical patients, even though insurance does not typically cover profiling of early-stage tumors and costs around \$1,500 per patient.

Over the past few years, we have been creating global partnerships to enhance this sequencing program.

- **Thailand:** By collecting tumors from patients with diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, we can better understand how pancreatic cancer occurs. Through our partnership with Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI), we are investigating if their samples have the same etiology as those collected at Jefferson. To further cement this partnership, in May 2025 Pongsakorn Choochuen, MD, PhD, arrived at Jefferson for a two-year exchange, after which he will take what he learns back to the CRI to improve treatment options.
- **Germany:** By sharing our de-identified samples with the non-profit TRON, they are helping us sequence our tumors while also using them to develop an immunotherapy treatment for pancreatic cancer, a form of treatment that is effective with other cancers but has been historically ineffective for pancreatic cancer. Additionally, through this partnership we made the groundbreaking discovery that fatty liver disease is a risk factor for pancreatic cancer and that having both fatty liver disease and pancreatic cancer increases the chance of tumor recurrence.
- **Albania:** Dr. Elda Grabocka's lab has been awarded a READ Fellowship (Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora) from the Albanian-American Development Foundation to examine the relationship between pancreatic cancer and metabolism. This work is in collaboration with Albania's University of Tirana.

**The patient impact:** By better understanding the composition of pancreatic tumors, we can further determine the best ways to treat pancreatic cancer in its various stages. Furthermore, by illustrating what early-stage tumors show about mutations and development, we have the potential to change insurance practices nationwide, so earlier sequencing is covered.



**“At Jefferson, we fuse discovery, imagination, and application—translating our pursuit of basic knowledge into real-world results. Donor support is crucial to keeping our research programs on the leading edge.”**

**Said Ibrahim, MD, MBA, MPH**

Anthony F. and Gertrude M. DePalma Dean,  
Sidney Kimmel Medical College  
President, Jefferson University Physicians



## SUPPORTING PATIENTS AT EVERY STEP OF THEIR HEALTHCARE JOURNEY

A cancer diagnosis can turn a patient's world upside down, not only impacting their physical health but also their mental well-being, finances, body image, and more. To ensure no one faces these challenges alone, we provide complementary (and complimentary) services that address the full range of our patients' needs.

The donor-supported **PATIENT ASSISTANCE FUND** offers financial relief to patients who cannot make ends meet when faced with medical bills and the additional costs associated with a cancer diagnosis. Over the past year, this fund has:

- Covered utility bills for a patient who couldn't work during treatment due to the frequency of visits and side effects.
- Provided a shower chair—which is not covered by insurance—for a patient who had moved to a new home and was struggling with mobility issues due to side effects of their chemotherapy.
- Paid a patient's phone bill so they would not lose contact with the care team in the middle of their treatment regimen.
- Purchased nutritional supplement drinks, which are costly and not typically covered by insurance, for a patient who was struggling to eat due to the side effects of treatment.



Mike Tester with the Jefferson team at TCGives's Sounds of Summer event in June 2025.

We are grateful to Tester Construction Gives (TCGives), the Pancreatic Cancer Cure Foundation (PCCF), and so many others who have consistently philanthropically supported this vital fund.

This March, thanks to donor support, our **CONNECTED CARE SERVICES (CCS)** team launched an in-person site on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Honickman Center. CCS is staffed with referral specialists who have specific training on the full range of financial resources available to Jefferson patients, as well as the eligibility requirements for each. Open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, the CCS team can help Jefferson patients access assistance with: medication costs, insurance coverage, finding a new primary care physician, food assistance, transportation to and from appointments, help with utility bills, and more.

For years, we have run an **IMAGE RECOVERY CENTER** in the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center – Jefferson Health Asplundh Cancer Pavilion (pictured below), and this January we opened a sister site in the Honickman Center. Bringing the comfort and care of a luxury spa to oncology patients, we offer specialized services including oncology massage therapy, initial head shaving, post-treatment haircuts, and hair, wig, skin, and nail care. Our providers are specially trained to support patients with compromised immune systems or low blood counts due to their treatments. These services help patients regain a sense of normalcy and feel more like themselves during a period of significant change.

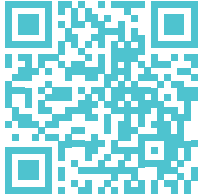


**“It’s extremely important for patients to be able to look in the mirror and recognize themselves. We address side effects of cancer treatment and help them feel more like themselves again.”**

Salon coordinator at Asplundh's Image Recovery Center

Located on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of the Honickman Center, the **CANCER SUPPORT AND WELCOME CENTER** offers a wide range of in-person and virtual supportive services for oncology patients, their loved ones, and caregivers, including:

- Educational classes about different aspects of treatment
- Music, art therapy, and writing/poetry workshops
- Notary and legal services
- Seminars on improving emotional wellbeing
- The Buddy Program, which pairs newly diagnosed patients with a trained cancer survivor
- Support groups targeted to specific populations, like those with advanced-stage cancer, young adult patients, caregivers, and more



Scan the QR code to learn more about the Cancer Support and Welcome Center's programs

## SPOTLIGHT: NUTRITION SERVICES



In the Cancer Support and Welcome Center, our pancreatic cancer patients can find assistance with maintaining a healthy diet during treatment. **Jacqueline Stulb RD, CSO, LDN**, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Board Certified Specialist in Oncology Nutrition, describes what a dietitian does for patients and highlights some of our services.

### **What are some of your main job responsibilities?**

My job is to work with patients, as well as their families and caregivers, to optimize nutrition and minimize symptoms from cancer and cancer treatment. I evaluate a patient's nutritional status and provide support and personalized guidance to improve nutritional status, energy levels, and reduce risk for malnutrition. I also work with patients in survivorship and provide educational seminars within our Cancer Support and Welcome Center and at oncology symposia.

### **What nutrition and diet support services would you highlight for our pancreatic cancer patients?**

We provide individual nutrition counseling for our pancreatic cancer patients and educate them on symptom management techniques, strategies to optimize nutrition, discuss signs/symptoms of exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, and help determine whether a patient would benefit from pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy. We also offer nutrition programs and classes.

### **What excites you most about your job?**

I love building a rapport with my patients and supporting them from diagnosis through survivorship. I like to help reduce our patients' stress levels, reassuring and supporting them during their cancer journey.

### **How can patients learn more about our dietitian services?**

Patients can learn more about our dietitian services by asking their oncologist or nurse to put in a nutrition consult or by visiting the Cancer Support and Welcome Center on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of the Honickman Center.

### **What has been one of your most rewarding days at Jefferson?**

Speaking at the Pancreatic Cancer and Related Diseases Patient Symposium in 2024! I loved presenting to patients and their families, as well as connecting with our community during the breakfast and luncheon.



## PARTNERING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Working in tandem with regional and national organizations, we are spreading awareness about pancreatic cancer and raising funds to advance research and provide immediate financial assistance to those most in need. All at the Center are especially grateful to steadfast partners and donors like the Pancreatic Cancer Cure Foundation (PCCF, Amy's Ride/Run/Walk and Paint the Trail Purple), Fencing Academy of Philadelphia, Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN), TCGives, and Wally's Warriors, who are committed to improving the lives of pancreatic cancer patients at Jefferson and beyond.





SIDNEY KIMMEL COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER

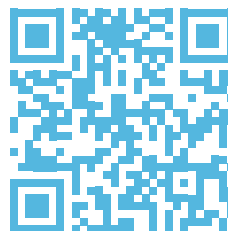
# 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Pancreatic Cancer and Related Diseases Patient Symposium

SAVE THE DATE  
NOVEMBER 8, 2025

**This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Annual Pancreatic Cancer and Related Diseases Patient Symposium.**

As the Center's flagship event, the symposium honors Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month each November by bringing together those impacted by pancreatic cancer to foster community and connection through patient testimonials, the Community Impact Award, and a survivor group photo. Through expert-led lectures and discussions, attendees gain insight into best practices, the latest research updates, and more.

Visit [Attend.Jefferson.edu/PancreaticSymposium](https://Attend.Jefferson.edu/PancreaticSymposium) or scan the QR code below to register for this milestone event. **We look forward to seeing you in Philadelphia on November 8th!**



*Our pancreatic cancer survivors give a thumbs up at the 2024 patient symposium.*





**Thank you for supporting  
Jefferson's pancreatic cancer community.**



# SIDNEY KIMMEL COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER

**If you would like to learn more or support  
any of the projects detailed in this report,  
please contact:**

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