

## **Debbie's Dream Foundation Partners with Oncology Researchers, National Organizations, and Renowned Experts to Address Congress on Insufficiently Funded Stomach Cancer Research Initiatives**

### **Research experts seek congressional support for increased research resources for curing stomach cancer**

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DAVIE, Fla., April 3, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer (DDF) hosted its first ever [Stomach Cancer Congressional Briefing on Capitol Hill](#) on February 28, 2014 to bring awareness about the increased incidence rate of stomach cancer in young adults and the need to increase funding to combat stomach cancer. The likelihood of being diagnosed at a younger age has increased by almost 70% since 1977 for those ages 25-39 years.

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The DDF Capitol Hill Briefing was held in cooperation with the Honorable Peter Roskam, the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA), and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.

Opening remarks were given by Debbie Zelman, President and Founder of DDF, who thanked attendees including patients, survivors, and advocates for stomach cancer research who traveled to Washington, DC from 16 states to raise awareness for the need to increase funding for stomach cancer research. Following Debbie's remarks, Dr. Ajani informed congressional attendees that stomach cancer receives the least amount of federal research funding per cancer death, and newer ideas are needed to address the younger generations who are being diagnosed with stomach cancer.

The reality that stomach cancer is increasingly being diagnosed was driven home during remarks made by [Adam Kuchinski, widower of a cancer patient](#). Adam shared the story of his wife who was diagnosed with stage IV stomach cancer at age 31 and lost her fight just nine months after diagnosis. Adam conveyed his hope for the 22,000 Americans who will learn that they have stomach cancer this year; 11,000 Americans will die this year from this deadly disease.

The audience then listened to the state of stomach cancer research. Speakers included:

- Jaffer A. Ajani, MD, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX
- Edith Mitchell, MD, FACP, Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia, PA
- Timothy Wang, MD, Columbia University Medical Center, New York, NY

These research and oncology experts discussed the constraints that limited research dollars for stomach cancer have on the ability to build an infrastructure that can lead to discoveries and better treatments. Eighty percent of stomach cancer is diagnosed at stage IV with a five-year survival rate of just four percent. Based on National Cancer Institute's FY 2012 data, when compared to the most common cancers, stomach cancer receives the least funding per cancer death (\$1,102) of any cancer.

"It is courageous to see how Debbie has dealt with her own battle with stomach cancer and created a foundation that provides support and guidance for patients and families who are battling this disease," said Dr. Ajani. "It is our goal to gain increased resource allocation for stomach cancer research by the National Cancer Institute and through the Department of Defense's Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program."

Stomach cancer in veterans is a malignancy that has been recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs as presumed to be service connected based on hazardous exposure to ionizing radiation. Additionally, research studies have discovered that U.S. soldiers living under field conditions are at greater risk of *H. pylori* infection, the most common cause of stomach cancer world-wide.

Kristin Fitzgerald, stomach cancer advocate and DDF Advocacy Chair, closed the session by showing the relationship that research dollars have to cancer survival. "Research funding equates to survival, and more research funding is needed for research to positively impact survival for stomach cancer patients," Fitzgerald said. "While the NCI budget level has been relatively constant, the funding for stomach cancer has decreased. This could negatively impact young people because stomach cancer is on the rise in people ages 25-39." Fitzgerald lost her husband, Ray, less than a year after his stomach cancer diagnosis when he was only thirty-six years old. Their daughters were ages 6, 3, and 1 when they lost their young father, who had been a Congressional staffer along with Kristin.

## **ABOUT DEBBIE'S DREAM FOUNDATION: CURING STOMACH CANCER**

DDF was founded in 2009 by Debbie Zelman after she was diagnosed with stage IV incurable gastric cancer in 2008 and given only weeks to live. Zelman immediately began to educate herself about this disease and to seek the best available care. When she responded favorably to her treatment, Debbie founded DDF which now has 20 chapters throughout the United States and Canada and a Medical Advisory Board of 25 renowned doctors from across the country. Now, six years later, Debbie is still receiving chemotherapy and is thrilled to be able to watch her three children grow up.

Debbie's Dream is committed to raising awareness about stomach cancer, providing funding for research, and helping provide education and support to patients, families, and caregivers around the world. The disease is estimated to be the fourth most common cancer worldwide and the second leading cause of death. Those who have been diagnosed with stage IV have a four percent chance of being alive in five years.

*Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer (DDF) was founded by Debbie Zelman in 2009 after she was diagnosed with stage IV stomach cancer in 2008. DDF is the leading 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to internationally raising awareness about stomach cancer, advancing funding for research, and providing education and support to patients, families, and caregivers. Debbie's Dream Foundation seeks as its ultimate goal to make the cure for stomach cancer a reality.*

<http://www.DebbiesDream.org>

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