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Survivors Proclaim November as Curing Stomach Cancer Month

Why is November not named an "awareness month?" Because stomach cancer isn't only about awareness.

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Did you know that November is Curing Stomach Cancer Month? Many states have now proclaimed it so.

Why is November not named an "awareness month?" Because stomach cancer isn't only about awareness. Stomach (gastric) cancer is a silent killer with very non-specific symptoms or no symptoms at all. There is no screening for stomach cancer available in the United States, and therefore, 80 percent of all stomach cancers are diagnosed at stage 4, which is the worst stage possible, and only 4 percent of patients with stage 4 gastric cancer live for five years after diagnosis.

Another scary fact is that stomach cancer is on the rise in Americans aged 25 to 39, which is young to be diagnosed with cancer. More than 22,000 Americans will be diagnosed with stomach cancer this year. How do I know all of this, you may ask? I was diagnosed with stage 4 stomach cancer when I was just 40 years old. I was the mother of three young children, married to a physician and was a practicing attorney with my own firm. I was healthy, didn't smoke or drink, exercised, took my vitamins, ate lots of salad and broccoli, and had no family history of cancer. I had NO risk factors for stomach cancer at all. Here I was living my life, thinking that I was doing everything right to avoid getting cancer, and then in April 2008, I was told that I only had a few weeks to live.

My first thoughts were of my children. I was scared that I would die and that my three-year-old daughter would not remember me. I was scared that my 10-year-old twins would go through their teenage years without a mother. I immediately decided that I was NOT going to let that happen, so I began the fight of my life. I underwent very harsh chemotherapy treatments, lost my hair, got neuropathy, almost lost several nails, spent years in bed, hospitals and doctors' offices, and had many painful days.

However, I refused to be just another statistic, so soon after I started my chemo treatments, a friend connected me to another stage 4 stomach cancer patient. I soon realized that he was a huge resource of information for me. I had so many questions about the cancer journey that only he could answer. The doctors, nurses and other

<http://www.curetoday.com/articles/survivors-proclaim-november-as-curing-stomach-cancer-month/1>

health care professionals were not as knowledgeable about the stomach cancer experience as another stomach cancer patient who had the same diagnosis as I did.

I began to look for resources and information about stomach cancer but there weren't any. I was shocked! In this information era, how could there be no information about a topic? I also realized that there hadn't been a new stomach cancer drug developed in 30 years. How was that possible?

All of this made me realize that there was a lot of work to be done to raise awareness, fund research, and support and educate patients, families and caregivers. It was then that I started activities to raise funds for stomach cancer research and to educate stomach cancer patients, families and caregivers. This was the beginning of Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer (DDF). I founded the organization in April 2009 to raise awareness, fund research, advocate for increased federal research funding, and educate stomach cancer patients, families and caregivers about stomach cancer.

As part of Debbie's Dream Foundation, we set up the Patient Resource Education Program (PREP) which matches stomach cancer survivors and caregivers as mentors with other stomach cancer patients and caregivers. The mentors are matched with the patients and caregivers as closely as possible by stage, biomarker, age, gender and region. It is so helpful to have someone to talk to about the shared experience.

Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer was the first organization in the United States to serve patients with stomach cancer. We have come a long way since I started DDF. Our headquarters are in South Florida, and we have 24 chapters across the United States, Canada and Germany. We have helped hundreds of stomach cancer patients, families and caregivers in 26 states and 12 countries. We have hosted many free educational symposia and webinars about stomach cancer treatments, surgery, radiation, side effect management, clinical trials, nutrition and much more. All lectures are housed on our website year-round. We have held two Capitol Hill Advocacy Days in Washington D.C. and have successfully increased federal research funding for gastric cancer by millions of dollars. We have also funded three Young Fellowship Awards totaling \$150,000. These young researchers will be establishing the foundation for future novel discoveries for stomach cancer treatments.

During Curing Stomach Cancer Month in November, it is the perfect time to get involved in the fight against stomach cancer, and we need your help. There are plenty of opportunities, and Debbie's Dream Foundation makes it easy for you to get involved. There are many events planned (view events) or you can plan your own. You can also request that your Governor declare November as Curing Stomach Cancer Month in your state. (View our Step-By-Step Guide here.) We already have 10 states that have proclaimed Curing Stomach Cancer Month. Our goal is to turn all 50 states periwinkle!

To read more about Curing Stomach Cancer Month and ways to get involved, visit www.debbiesdream.org.

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Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer