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Dreaming BIG against Stomach Cancer

by [PACE USA](#) 11/14/14

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Today's guest blog comes to us from Debbie Zelman, President and Founder of Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer.

Stomach cancer, also known as gastric cancer, is a silent killer with very non-specific symptoms or no symptoms at all. There is no screening available in the United States, making late-stage diagnosis very common to where only 4% of patients will live for five years after diagnosis. Stomach cancer is on the rise in Americans ages 25-39 and more than 22,000 Americans are expected to be diagnosed this year.

Knowing about stomach cancer is vital for me because in April 2008 I was diagnosed at stage IV when I was just 40 years old. I was the mother of three young children, married to a physician, and a practicing attorney. I was healthy, didn't smoke or drink, exercised, took my vitamins, ate right, and had no family history of cancer. I had NO risk factors and thought I was doing everything right for my health, only to be told that I only had a few weeks to live.

Thinking of my children, I immediately decided that I was NOT going to let that happen and began the fight of my life. I fought hard in my treatment, but had so many questions about stomach cancer. In my search for resources, I found little available. My biggest support came from another patient.

It became obvious that more needed to be done to raise awareness, fund research, and support and educate patients, families and caregivers. I felt that I could lead that effort and, just one year after my diagnosis, I founded Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer.



Recalling my own supportive experience of talking to another patient, we set up the Patient Resource Education Program, matching stomach cancer survivors and caregivers as mentors for other stomach cancer patients and caregivers. We do our best to match closely by stage, biomarker, age, gender, region and other factors. As I knew from my own experience, it is so helpful to talk to someone about the shared experience.

We have hosted many free educational symposia and webinars about stomach cancer treatments, side effect management, clinical trials, nutrition, and much more. We have held two Capitol Hill Advocacy Days in Washington D.C., successfully increasing federal research funding for gastric cancer by millions of dollars. We now fund three Young Fellowship Awards to support young researchers and potential novel stomach cancer treatments.

Debbie's Dream Foundation has come a long way in our first five years: we have 24 chapters across the United States, Canada and Germany, and have helped stomach cancer patients, families and caregivers in 12 countries.

November is the perfect time to get involved in the fight against stomach cancer, and we need your help. Visit the Debbie's Dream Foundation website to get involved.

Please dream BIG with me to make the cure for stomach cancer a reality. Together we can do anything!

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