New pancreatic cancer trial provides hope to BC family

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CCTG PA7 study combines immunotherapy drugs with standard chemotherapy

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An innovative clinical trial underway across Canada is providing new hope to a B.C. family braving pancreatic cancer – the deadliest cancer facing Canadians today.

The Canadian Cancer Trials Group (CCTG), PA.7 clinical trial combines cutting-edge immunotherapy drugs with standard chemotherapy – a successful mix for treating certain cancers such as kidney and lung – to treat pancreatic cancer, which has the lowest survival rate of all, according to a June report from the Canadian Cancer Society.

For BC Cancer patients such as Susan Stewart, who was diagnosed with Stage IV pancreatic cancer in December 2016, it’s a promising prospect that yields new hope for her family as they face the uncertainty of the disease, underscoring the need to increase support for pancreatic cancer research.

Stewart is currently enrolled in the PA.7 immunotherapy and chemotherapy clinical trial, led by CCTG and chaired by Dr. Daniel Renouf, co-director of Pancreas Centre BC, at BC Cancer Agency’s Vancouver Centre. Since beginning the trial, Stewart — who was one of the first patients to be accepted to the trial in Canada — has since seen a significant reduction in her tumour size and stark drop in her cancer cell markers. Results from the trial, however, are not yet conclusive.

“At this point, my family knows the statistics pertaining to pancreatic cancer prognoses, and how poor the outlook is,” says Stewart. “But being accepted into this trial gives us a chance to potentially start changing those statistics and improving the outlook for those with this malignancy. I get asked many times if I feel like a guinea pig participating in this trial, but I’d rather call myself a pioneer”
According to her daughter Natalie, the family’s newfound hope highlights the importance of raising awareness and funds for pancreatic cancer research—a cause often overlooked, especially compared to other types of cancer.

“Since there is such a low survival rate, there are not a lot of survivors out there advocating for the cause and raising money,” she says. “It works like a vicious cycle: Low survival rates mean low funding, and meanwhile this minimal funding means less opportunity for potential lifesaving research and clinical trials that would subsequently increase survival rates.”

Inspired by her mother’s treatment, Natalie and father Norm, sister Holly and brother Austin banded together for the Glotman-Simpson Cypress Challenge this past summer. Not only did they raise money for the cause, but they also help to shed light on an issue that so often remains in the dark.

According Dr. Renouf, those funds make all the difference in the quest to find a cure for pancreatic cancer. “The impact of philanthropy cannot be underestimated and is very critical in advancing treatment for this disease,” he says.

About PA.7

A Randomized Phase II Trial of Gemcitabine and Nab-Paclitaxel vs Gemcitabine, Nab-Paclitaxel, Durvalumab and Tremelimumab as 1st Line Therapy in Metastatic Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma. Inclusion Criteria: Metastatic pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma No prior treatment for metastatic disease May have received prior adjuvant Gemcitabine if longer than 6 months before recurrence Archival tissue available for correlative analysis ECOG PS 0,1 Exclusion Criteria: Medical contraindications to Gemcitabine or Nab-Paclitaxel Medical contraindications to MEDI 4736 (e.g. autoimmune disease). To find out more please visit: CancerView.ca

This story is courtesy of the The BC Cancer Foundation - the bridge that connects philanthropic support and research breakthroughs in cancer knowledge. As the fundraising partner of the BC Cancer Agency and the largest charitable funder of cancer research in British Columbia, to enable donors to make contributions to leading-edge research that has a direct impact on improvements to cancer care for patients. Since its inception, over $2-million has been raised by the BC Cancer Foundation to help BC Cancer Agency develop new treatment options for patients facing this disease, providing hope to thousands across B.C. and beyond.