



Medical Hero in the Spotlight

Athlete embraces clinical trials with a competitor's spirit and hope

Randy Ulrey, a 39-year-old athlete and healthcare company vice president, is used to mastering tough challenges. Today, he is bringing the self-discipline, determination and healthy habits of a lifelong athlete to bear as a clinical trial participant battling cancer.

Fourteen years ago Randy discovered a mole on the upper left side of his back and was diagnosed with Stage I malignant melanoma, a cancer found in the outer layer of the skin that has not spread beyond the original cancer site. Doctors removed the mole and Randy went about his life. He stayed active in sports and tried to be careful about exposure to the sun.

In late 2009, Randy started noticing critical symptoms, including blood in his urine. His doctor ordered a CT scan, which revealed a tumor in his bladder and three metastases. Surgeons removed the tumor in the bladder, but could not remove those outside the bladder.

“Two other tumors are still present outside my right kidney,” says Randy. “We are fighting those with clinical trials medication.”

Randy's father asked the Center for Information & Study on Clinical Research Participation (CISCRP) to help locate a clinical trial that might benefit his son. CISCRP staff members ran a custom search and identified a number of studies dealing with melanoma.

“For me, the bigger decision was which clinical trial

to enroll in, not if I should enroll,” says Randy, who sought input from family, physicians, and friends in making his decision. “I have at least 25 valued people who I discuss this with and who give me opinions.”

Randy is currently enrolled in a clinical trial in Santa Monica. His experimental medication utilizes an existing drug mixed with a new medication. Randy has been going to a clinic weekly since autumn of 2009.

Randy's side effects from the medication include a bit of nausea and fatigue. For him, however, the big downside of taking part in a clinical trial is not the physical effect of the drugs, but the waiting time at the clinical trial site.

“I'm there for 4 to 5 hours every week,” he says. While the research team is knowledgeable and caring, Randy says it's so busy on Tuesdays; and with all the rules and regulations from the drug company, there is a patient bottleneck.

Despite being a cancer patient, Randy has the optimistic attitude of a top athlete. “My attitude is as good as it can be,” he says. “I'm as positive as I ever have been that I will beat this.”

Randy's current aim is to promote more efforts to help people learn about clinical trials; find the information they need; and help them make decisions about these potentially-lifesaving treatments.

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