Baseball, Cancer and a Very Grateful Patient Who Wanted to Give Back

A native of Parkland, Florida, Anthony Rizzo was fulfilling his dream of playing professional baseball as a Single A ball player when he was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. Living in Boston at the time, Anthony’s doctors told him to go to Sylvester to be treated by Dr. Izidore Lossos, Director of the Lymphoma Program at Sylvester.

After 6 months of chemotherapy and the support of his friends, family and teammates, Anthony was told by Dr. Lossos that he was in remission. That was when he realized he wanted to become a role model to help cancer patients and their families. And that was when the Anthony Rizzo Foundation began.

Today he plays for the Chicago Cubs, but his Foundation is based in Florida where he organized “Walk Off For Cancer,” a 5K charity walk that attracted more than 1,000 entrants and raised more than $50,000 for cancer research. The event also connected the Cubs first baseman with a patient recently diagnosed with the same type of cancer – a patient he began counseling through her treatment process.

Anthony Rizzo is truly a role model and an All-star in our book!

“Thank you for all that you have done,” said the Grateful Patient. “You have been a true inspiration to me and my family. Your courage and determination have given me strength and hope. I am forever grateful to you for your kindness and support.”

NEW FACILITIES
To Better Serve Our Patients

alex’s place
Our new pediatric oncology center gives children a warm and inviting clinical home that is geared to them and their needs as children while undergoing treatment.

Child life specialist Leticia Casom, M.Ed., CCLS, and patient Madhi Haech play with the interactive computer at alex’s place.

Fred Havenick Intensive Care Unit
After opening its doors in May, this much-needed resource is providing highly specialized care for critically ill patients.

UHealth at Plantation
Starting in the fall of 2012, patients began receiving world-class cancer care and services, including infusion therapy, imaging and laboratory services, closer to home.

How You Can Help Today!

Please consider making a contribution to Sylvester by sending a check made out to Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, or by visiting our website at www.sylvester.org/how_to. For more information or physician referrals, please call (305) 243-1000 or (800) 545-2292. Sylvester, Office of Development, PO Box 016960 (M867), Miami, FL 33101-9844

CONNECT WITH US!

If you do not wish to receive further fundraising communications from the University of Miami Medical Program-UHealth System, please send your request either by email to the following address: mdepoptout@med.miami.edu or mail your request to the Office of Patient Privacy, Biscayne B, P.O. Box 019134 (M-4797), Miami, Florida 33101. Be sure to include the following: Name, Address, Phone Number and Email address. Only complete requests can be processed. You may receive additional communication during the processing of your request.

Extraordinary Clinical Trial Uses Patients’ Own Cells to Create Vaccine

Meet Dr. Komotar’s First Patient Enrolled in this Clinical Trial

Cathy Booker
“I want to see my children have children”
This mother of two from Weston was the first patient enrolled in Dr. Komotar’s trial. She was diagnosed after she started experiencing numbness in her hands. Scared but determined she sought out Dr. Komotar’s new treatment option as her best possible chance to have more time with her kids.

“With this type of tumor there are cells that have spread well beyond the margin,” said Dr. Komotar. “That’s why you need to have therapies post operatively.” The vaccine uses Cathy’s immune system to create a stronger immune system response to prevent the tumor from coming back.

And while the devoted mother and wife is optimistic about a healthy future, she hopes her story will help other patients too. “I just want to make sure when people learn they have something like this, they have options and know trials are available,” shares Cathy.

In Florida alone, an estimated 600 new glioblastoma patients will be diagnosed this year. Early results with the vaccine, according to Dr. Komotar, have been promising, nearly doubling life expectancy.

From left, are Ricardo Komotar, M.D., patient Cathy Hoffman-Booker, and Deborah Heros, M.D.

Cancer patients suffering from the most common and aggressive form of brain tumor have new hope. Ricardo J. Komotar, M.D., Director of Neurooncology at Sylvester, is conducting a Phase II clinical trial for brain cancer patients with glioblastoma multiforme.

Sylvester is one of only eight medical centers in the country, and the only one in Florida, offering this treatment option.

The trial consists of two main steps. First, surgeons remove the malignant tumor during awake craniotomy (brain surgery while the patient is awake and talking with surgeons). Keeping a patient awake during surgery is necessary when their tumor is near an area of the brain that controls certain key functions, such as speech.

By talking with the patient during the surgery, and seeing how he understands and is able to answer questions, the surgeons confirm they are not impacting the patient’s speech, and are able to safely remove much more of the tumor than they would otherwise.

During the tumor removal process, the surgeon isolates essential proteins from the tumor to be used in the creation of a vaccine, which is the second step of the trial.

These proteins – the patient’s own cells – are used to create a cancer vaccine (Heat Shock Protein Vaccine) to fight remaining cancer cells in his body. Six to eight weeks after the surgery, the patient receives their tailor-made vaccination. The patient’s immune system recognizes these proteins as invaders, and triggers its natural attack system to fight it, without injury to normal, healthy cells.

“This vaccine represents the future of cancer therapy,” says Dr. Komotar. “The fact that we can have someone’s own immune system combat their tumor is an extremely promising step in the right direction.” And while he acknowledges there is still more to be done, he believes these vaccines would not only keep the tumor from coming back, but it would be a cure for this form of cancer.

“Each patient is unique and responds differently,” said Dr. Komotar. “But we are very hopeful that this type of approach, using the patient’s own immune system, will be the way we fight not just brain cancer, but many cancers.”
Sylvester Celebrates 20 Years of Fighting Cancer

Sylvester is recognized as one of the top cancer centers in the United States. Under the new leadership of Dr. Stephen D. Nimer, and building on the firmly established excellence of its first 20 years, Sylvester is well prepared to advance to its next goal: to rank among the best in the world in fighting cancer and to expand its world-class cancer care for the people of Florida.

“Since its founding, Sylvester has bettered the lives of thousands of cancer patients, families and loved ones. From treatment to research, our community has been the beneficiary of so many doctors, nurses, volunteers and others whose dedication touches us all.”

– Florencia Tabeni, General Manager, JW Marriott Marquis Miami, host of the 20th Anniversary Gala

Life-Changing Research at Sylvester

Commemorating Sylvester’s 100th Adult Stem Cell Transplant

Krishna Komanduri, M.D., and his team performed their 100th stem cell transplant on October 26—a historic milestone that underscores the cancer center’s growing prominence. The procedure was on a woman with a cancer of the plasma cells in bone marrow. In the transplant, the team infused the adult stem cells that had been previously harvested from the patient.

“Stem cell transplants are among the most complex medical procedures conducted at cancer centers,” said Komanduri. “They require a high level of clinical infrastructure as well as professional expertise at every stage in order to maintain a high level of clinical care.”

“We are achieving excellent outcomes in treating some of the most challenging cancer cases,” shares Komanduri.

Gene Sequencing Project Identifies Abnormal Gene Responsible for Rare Childhood Cancer

New research identifying a gene responsible for a rare and tough-to-cure subtype of childhood leukemia is laying the groundwork for clinical and treatment advances.

“Childhood leukemia is often curable, but this type of leukemia is often fatal,” said Stephen D. Nimer, M.D., co-author of this study. “So the insights into what drives this type of leukemia are not only scientifically important, but they will help us develop new therapeutic strategies.”

Clinical Trials

There were 142 clinical trials underway at Sylvester in 2012, with 136 trials active at year-end. From initial pilot/feasibility studies through Phase III trials, where new drugs or surgical procedures are tested against the current standard treatments, there were trials in more than a dozen site-specific types of cancer along with 52 trials focused on pediatric cancers. There are also on-going research studies in areas such as the long-term cardiac impact of cancer treatments for children.

For general information about clinical trials at Sylvester, call 305-243-1000.

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Stephen D. Nimer, M.D., became the director of the cancer center in May. Coming from Memorial Sloan-Kettering in New York, Dr. Nimer brings 30 years of pioneering research and clinical experience and an unquenchable passion for improving the lives of patients with cancer, and their families.

J. William Kingston joined the Sylvester staff as the new Executive Director of Development. Brining 25 years of successful healthcare fundraising experience, Kingston is up to the challenge of raising the funds necessary to achieve the ambitious research and patient care goals of the Cancer Center. He is committed, too, to keeping Sylvester’s many donors and friends informed about the life-saving work their donations make possible.

James Harbour, M.D., joined Sylvester as Vice Chairman for Translational Research and Director of Ocular Oncology. Harbour comes to Miami from Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, after receiving his M.D. from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Emmanuel Thomas, M.D., Ph.D., joined our team as Research Assistant Professor, Department of Cell Biology. Most recently, Thomas was a Research Fellow at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases at the National Institutes of Health.

NEW! Sylvester’s Wish List

The Wish List is an opportunity to assist the patients and their families that Sylvester serves across South Florida. Some of the most popular items requested by patients, families and staff:

• Love Bundle Program – Age-appropriate backpacks filled with toys and games delivered to newly diagnosed pediatric patients. $50 each.
• Financial Assistance Program – Gift cards and transportation vouchers to help cover transportation costs to get to and from Sylvester for treatment. $25 each.
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If you are interested in helping make life more comfortable for all who come to Sylvester and would like to sponsor one of the above Wish List items, please contact Loana Cervantes at (305) 243-4686.

Events Benefiting Research at Sylvester

Third Annual Dolphins Cycling Challenge raised $2.2 million for cancer research!

“Inexperienced the devastation that cancer can wield, it is great to know that we can rely on a first-class cancer center in our own backyard. Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center will use these funds for research in the pursuit of finding a cure, and without all of the dedicated riders, sponsors and volunteers this would not be possible,” said Dolphins Cycling Challenge CEO Michael Mandich, the son of Jim “Mad Dog” Mandich, the Dolphins alumus and sportscaster who died from bile duct cancer five months after the inaugural ride.

Sylvester’s 20th Anniversary Gala Raises Record $1.3 Million

Nearly 600 party-goers attended this spectacular event, which has become one of the primary fundraising events supporting Sylvester’s mission of providing the most comprehensive and compassionate care to all patients.

Speaking to the crowd, UM President Donna E. Shalala said Sylvester provides “a shared mission of hope and healing” to those facing cancer, and declared the evening “a celebration of community.”

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In only its third year, the Dolphins Cycling Challenge is hugely successful. The 2012 event doubled the total raised the prior year, donating $2.2 million to Sylvester. The organization is looking forward to an even bigger event next year.

Thanks to all – cyclists, volunteers and donors – who participated! Their efforts are truly helping make South Florida a healthier place for us all. And don’t forget to mark your calendars now! The Dolphins Cycling Challenge 2013 will be held in November.

Jennifer Stearns Buttrick (Gala Chair) and Joan Scheiner (Chair, Sylvester Board of Governors)
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"There is light at the end of the tunnel," said the newly-diagnosed patient. "Look at him. He's playing baseball. He's healthy. He's big. He's strong. That lets you know you can get through this. I'm going to be OK."