

Spotlight

Yale
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Hospital

NEWSLETTER FOR OUR DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND FRIENDS

SUMMER 2018



Melissa's wedding, just five months before she passed away from lung cancer. Twin sister Lindsay, left, and older sister Kristen, right.

Game-changing lung cancer treatment came too late for Melissa

But if you join the fight, it will change the future

"LINDS, SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT," said Melissa Marottoli to her twin sister, Lindsay.

At 26 years old, you don't expect to have serious health problems. But when Melissa became unsteady on her feet one morning in 2007, Lindsay took her to get checked out at the emergency room, just in case.

After a few hours and several tests, the doctor told Melissa, "You have a brain tumor." She was admitted immediately for brain surgery, and the terrifying diagnosis came the next day.

Lung cancer, in both lungs.

In that instant, the Marottolis' lives were forever changed. This close-knit family—Melissa, Lindsay, their

older sister Kristen, and parents Sal and Alie—made it their mission to learn everything they could and explore every possible option to combat this terrible disease.

"Mel had an amazing spirit; she felt she was going to beat all the odds," says Lindsay.

Melissa started chemotherapy, while Lindsay and their father traveled throughout the world, seeking out the most progressive treatments.

"They went to many different places, looking at regular therapies, targeted therapies," says Scott Gettinger, MD, medical oncology, who later became Melissa's oncologist at Smilow Cancer Hospital. "Then they went one step further. It was almost as if they could see into the future."

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Early pioneers of a revolutionary approach

Lindsay and Melissa were identical twins. Their research led them to believe that somehow they could make use of Lindsay's healthy immune system to help Melissa fight the disease.

At that time, there was not much support for immunotherapy as a treatment for lung cancer in the U.S. medical community. So the Marottolis sought out a physician in Europe who specialized in cell therapy—someone who worked with them to collect specialized immune cells from Lindsay and infuse them into Melissa.

"Mel lived five years with a one-year prognosis," says Lindsay. "We have to assume some of that time came from what we did overseas."

Tragically, Melissa eventually lost her fight, passing away at 31. It was five short months after her wedding.

"When Mel passed away, we felt we had to continue to fight," says Lindsay, "because she wouldn't want anyone else to suffer the way she did."

Lindsay and Kristen created the Melissa Marottoli Hogan Foundation to raise money for lung cancer research. The Marottolis were drawn to Dr. Gettinger's work at Smilow Cancer Hospital, where he is conducting research into immunotherapy for patients with lung cancer—based on some of



Melissa's sisters, Lindsay (l) and Kristen (r)

the same concepts as the treatment Melissa and Lindsay had tried in Europe.

In the past five years, the foundation has raised over \$250,000. And every penny of it has gone to Dr. Gettinger's efforts, which include conducting clinical trials to evaluate immunotherapy for lung cancer patients. The results of these trials have been astonishingly successful for patients with similar diagnoses to Melissa's.

"Through Dr. Gettinger, we've seen people who were diagnosed just a couple of years after Mel—with the same death sentence she had," says Kristen. "They're on new immunotherapy trials, and they are still alive, five, six, even eight years later."

"It didn't happen for Mel," Kristen adds. "But it's happening for others in her situation. And this research will apply to other types of cancer as well. It's a fantastic victory." ♥

"Everyone is affected by cancer. This research into immunotherapy is starting to look like it may actually lead to a cure—and soon. Who wouldn't want to donate to that?" LINDSAY MAROTTOLI

Sources: Lung Cancer Alliance, Bonnie J. Addario Lung Cancer Foundation, National Cancer Institute, Scott Gettinger, MD

7 myth-busting facts you should know about lung cancer

- Lung cancer is NOT just a smoker's disease.** Nearly 80% of those with lung cancer are former or never smokers.
- Lung cancer is the deadliest of all cancers,** killing more people than the next 3 deadliest cancers combined—colorectal, pancreatic, and breast cancer.
- 1 in 15 Americans will be diagnosed with lung cancer,** making it one of the most common types of cancer, second only to breast cancer.
- Lung cancer ranks near the bottom in terms of U.S. cancer research funding,** even though it is responsible for 29% of all cancer deaths. This is partly due to the misperception that those with lung cancer bring the disease upon themselves by smoking.
- Lung cancer CAN be detected at an early** and treatable stage through CT scans, which are covered by most insurance plans and Medicare for high-risk patients.
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women,** surpassing breast cancer.
- Your donations are transforming the lives of lung cancer patients** by enabling the discovery of radical new treatments. Several Smilow Cancer Hospital patients with prior prognoses of less than a year are living disease-free more than five years from starting immunotherapy.

➔ Breakthroughs you make possible

Finally—hope for lung cancer patients



SCOTT GETTINGER, MD (left), is a physician in medical oncology at Smilow Cancer Hospital, where he took care of Melissa and got to know the Marottoli family. He is internationally recognized for his expertise in lung cancer treatment and research, best known for his work in immunotherapy and targeted therapy for non-small-cell lung cancer. He currently leads several clinical trials evaluating novel therapies for patients with lung cancer.

We asked him some questions about the nearly miraculous results he's seeing in his work with immunotherapy. Here are his answers.

Q: What exactly is immunotherapy?

A: Immunotherapy for cancer is a type of therapy that uses medicines to activate and release the patient's own immune system to attack and control cancer.

Q: Why is it different from—and potentially better than—traditional chemotherapy treatments for lung cancer?

A: Chemotherapy has limited effectiveness in treating advanced lung cancer. It typically produces only modest gains in a patient's survival—months—at the cost of compromised quality of life due to common side effects. Immunotherapy is generally better tolerated than chemotherapy, with more durable responses and potential for long-term survival—and possibly, cure.

Q: What results have you seen so far in your clinical trials?

A: We started enrolling patients with advanced lung cancer in trials evaluating newer immunotherapies in 2009. Back then, no one believed immunotherapy would work in lung cancer. Yet from that first trial, we continue to follow patients who are doing well, without evidence of active cancer, now—over eight years from starting trial therapy.

Prior to trial therapy, these patients had only months to live, having already received multiple standard chemotherapies or targeted therapies for advanced disease. Since these early trials, four immunotherapies have been approved for lung cancer.

Q: Does immunotherapy hold promise for patients with other types of cancers?

A: Yes. Recent success of immunotherapy across tumor types has provided just a glimpse into the potential of our immune system to control and eradicate cancer. Immunotherapies are currently FDA approved for several types of cancer.

Q: You've already had such spectacular results—why do you still need people to donate to this work?

A: We've still got a long way to go. Although immunotherapy has dramatically affected some patients, the majority still don't derive lasting benefit. We now need to focus on why some patients respond to this type of treatment—and why others don't. As we learn more, we will be able to control and cure cancer in increasingly more patients. **The answers are there. With resources, we will find them.** ♥



Welcome Dan Weintraub!

We are delighted to introduce Dan Weintraub (above), our new senior planned giving officer. He would love to meet you to learn about why YNHH matters to you—and to help you create the bequest or planned gift that will best suit your situation.

Contact Dan at **203-688-5902** or **dan.weintraub@ynhh.org**.

Get your FREE e-brochure, explaining how surprisingly easy and affordable it is to plan a gift to YNHH in your will: **givetoynhh.org/gift-plans**



Check out our brand-new website!

givetoynhh.org

Completely redesigned with YOU in mind.

See what your gifts make possible!



The many ways you make a difference

RJ is getting a head start on his medical career by volunteering.

Life as a YNHH volunteer: It's a win-win!

AT ONLY 16, RJ STREATER of Cheshire, CT, knows exactly what he wants to do with his life.

RJ's experience as a YNHH youth volunteer has given him an early look into the world of medicine and an opportunity to get some real, hands-on experience in different departments of the hospital. Based on what he's seen so far, he's decided he wants to become a physician specializing in medical oncology.

"I've known I wanted to work in medicine since I was in eighth grade," says RJ. Both his parents are professionals in the field of medicine. And he's always loved science and biology in school.

"I wanted to get into a medical setting as soon as possible—to feel what it was like, get comfortable with health care settings and staff, and learn about how to treat patients," he says. "When I found out about the YNHH Youth Volunteer Program, I applied as soon as I was old enough."

Fifteen is the minimum age for a youth volunteer, and RJ didn't waste a moment. He's already completed three volunteer sessions—one last summer

and two during the school year. In June he began his fourth session, where, in addition to helping out on one of the units, he's also serving as a leader/mentor for all of the new students joining the program.

"It's an amazing experience," he says. "I've already learned so much about different diseases, what the staff does, the different treatments patients receive, the emotions of the families, and the doctor/patient/family relationship."

RJ's experience volunteering in the Medical Oncology Unit at Smilow confirmed his desire to pursue a career in that field. "Several family members and close friends have died of cancer," he says. "That field just keeps pulling me back. I want to learn more. There's so much more research to be done."

Clearly, word has gotten out about how gratifying and valuable the volunteer program is at YNHH. It's growing by leaps and bounds. This year, there will be 450 kids participating along with RJ. Wonderful for the staff, wonderful for the patients. And it's paving the way for the medical professionals of tomorrow. It's a win-win! ♥



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Follow RJ's lead

You can volunteer at either the York Street or Saint Raphael campus, whatever your age or interest.

For information and to apply:

ynhh.org/about/community/volunteers

Closer to Free September 8, 2018



There's still time to sign up!

Join the heroes who raise funds for cancer care and research

Register now at rideclostofree.org

