

# Oncology Times

Eric Rosenthal Reports

Thoughts and observations about issues, trends, and controversies in the cancer community.

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## At AACR: Stand Up To Cancer Presents Anecdotal Patient Success Story within Scientific Context

CHICAGO -- Only one speaker received a standing ovation during the Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C) news briefing here last Sunday at the American Association for Cancer Research Annual Meeting, and it wasn't one of the renowned cancer researchers or Academy Award-nominated actor and SU2C "ambassador" Terrence Howard, but rather Jeannette Daniel, a 51-year-old metastatic breast cancer patient who had been declared cancer-free for several months after enrolling in one of the SU2C clinical trials made possible by funding for the so-called scientific dream teams.



Daniel's story was compelling and moving and, although anecdotal, was meaningful because it was delivered within the context of clinical science as an example of the progress being made against cancer through innovative integration of various researchers who might not have otherwise collaborated together. After thanking her "many heroes" in the audience of dream team members "for keeping me alive one day at a time," the Memphis zookeeper confessed to having been a cynic most of her life who now believes that in her lifetime, "we will find the key that takes this monster down."

She said that after undergoing three years of chemotherapy, her tumor continued to grow and she asked her oncologist "how much more would it hurt?"

He responded that in six months the cancer would use her up and, she wouldn't wake up from sleep.

"Did that asshole just tell me I was going to die?" she said, explaining that he had misunderstood her question, and she got really angry.

Daniel said her partner was a physician and had found a study at Vanderbilt by searching online, a clinical trial that was part of the **Targeting PI3K in Women's Cancers Dream Team**, one of 34 clinical trials facilitated by the dream teams.

Arnold J. Levine, PhD, vice chairperson of the Scientific Advisory Committee assembled by AACR, SU2C's scientific partner, said that currently more than 270 scientists from about 70 institutions are involved in dream team efforts.

Since announcing the original five teams in 2009 --

- **Targeting PI3K;**
- Cutting Off the Fuel Supply: A New Approach to the Treatment of Pancreatic Cancer;
- Bioengineering and Clinical Applications of Circulating Tumor Cells Chip;
- Bringing Epigenetic Therapy to the Forefront of Cancer Management; and
- An Integrated Approach to Targeting Breast Cancer Molecular Subtypes and Their "Resistance" Phenotypes—

two more teams have been added: Personalized Medicine for Patients with BRAF Wildtype (BRAFWT) Cancer, funded in partnership with the Melanoma Research Alliance, and the newest, announced at the news conference, Precision Therapy for Advanced Prostate Cancer, in partnership with the Prostate Cancer Foundation. Also announced were that details about the eighth, an immunology dream team, in partnership with the Cancer Research Institute, were expected to be announced in the fall.

"It is very gratifying that other foundations have embraced our model," SU2C co-founder Kathleen Lobb, senior vice president of the nonprofit Entertainment Industry Foundation, which oversees SU2C, told me after the briefing, adding that each of these co-partnered teams would have a joint scientific advisory committee consisting of members from SU2C's Scientific Advisory Committee and the collaborative organization.



At the briefing, Terrence Howard discussed losing his 56-year-old mother three years ago to colon cancer, and said that he had an aunt and uncle who were currently undergoing cancer treatment.

In fact, Howard had missed the original SU2C broadcast in 2008 -- which was simulcast on ABC, CBS, and NBC for one hour during primetime as a celebrity-filled fundraising event -- because he was taking care of his mother who died shortly afterward. He then came forward and offered to become more active in the SU2C effort.

"I've been involved from the get-go, and it's a privilege to be here and hear about the progress firsthand." After discussing how his family has suffered from the disease he said, "I may be the next hostage in this war and I recognize I may be asking you for your help before it takes me hostage. I'm asking that you take these steps right now to end cancer, and I look forward to the day that no family has to endure the loss that mine has."



During the event I also spoke briefly with Daniel D. Von Hoff, MD -- co-leader with Craig B. Thompson, MD, of the dream team working on cutting the fuel supply to pancreatic cancer -- about his dream team experience.

"It took a year to a year and a half until we felt we had jelled [to the maximum] and were really hitting it on all cylinders," he said, adding that many other researchers who hadn't applied or didn't get dream team grants started calling and offering assays, agents, or techniques that they thought might be helpful.

"It's really been amazing how many people have just thrown in their expertise. But what I've really most enjoyed seeing and what's been really heartening is having bench scientists see the patient aspect of it, and the sense of urgency has really been incredible." He said that this has been aided by some researchers losing personal friends to cancer, and motivating them to move things into the clinic. "I think they can see that the structure gives them a chance to get their ideas into people. It really has worked, and it also makes everyone want to be very sure of their findings since they know it will be used on patients."

Von Hoff, whose team was created through a "shotgun marriage" fostered by the Scientific Advisory Committee, said there was no question that more progress had been made because of the synergy. "I can say we never would have had a chance to work with many of these people and it really has been great."

#### About the Author



Eric T. Rosenthal has spent nearly 40 years in journalism and academic public affairs, more than half of them involved in the cancer community. He has received several journalism awards as Special Correspondent for *Oncology Times*, and helped organize two national conferences dealing with medicine and the media.