



An Interview with the President of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network

Sheri Sturgis

Partners in Pancreatic Cancer
Online Community
www.partnersinpancreaticcancer.com

Julie Fleshman

President and CEO
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
www.pancan.org

Sturgis: Hi, I am Sheri Sturgis of Partners in Pancreatic Cancer, a new online community that is dedicated to providing education and resources to community oncologists who provide care to patients of pancreatic cancer. I am joined today by Julie Fleshman, president and CEO of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. Julie, welcome.

Fleshman: Thank you.

Sturgis: Why don't we begin by telling us a little about yourself and about the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network.

Fleshman: Great, so, I have been in the presidency of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network for 13 years. I was hired as the first full-time employee soon after my own father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He was 52 years old and only lived for 4 months. So, I am very passionate about changing the course of history for this disease. The Pancreatic Cancer Action Network is a National Patient Advocacy Organization for pancreatic cancer, and we really have a comprehensive approach to fighting pancreatic cancer. We are funding research grants. We are advocating for increased federal dollars for pancreatic cancer research for scientists all around the country. We provide patients with information and resources for our patient services program, and we are really raising the awareness, visibility, and sense of urgency that people need to take action through our volunteer network around the country, so really a comprehensive approach in trying to fill in all the gaps to move this disease forward.

Sturgis: Can you tell us what some specific goals the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network has?

Fleshman: Sure, so one of our main goals is to double the survival rate for pancreatic cancer by 2020, and there are several different things that we are doing and then we will be measuring along the way to show that we are making progress toward that goal. So, one is looking at the number of scientists that are studying pancreatic cancer and increasing that number. We need to grow the field and have a critical mass of researchers that are focused on pancreatic cancer. Two is increasing the dollars that



are available for research both publicly at the federal level as well as privately the dollars that we are raising as an organization. We want to increase the enrollment in pancreatic cancer clinical trials. At the end of the day, that is the only way we are going to get to new drugs for this patient community, and then finally, raising the awareness through our many events that are happening all around the country, increasing the number of people that are coming to those events, and joining our national movement.

Sturgis: So, how are your research grants program—how does it run? Can you tell us a little about that?

Fleshman: Sure, so we partner with the American Association for Cancer Research, AACR to administer our research grants program. So, if a scientist were interested in applying, they would go actually to AACR's website and apply through them. Then, there is a peer review process, a competitive peer review process to select the very best science, and in this last year, we funded over \$5,000,000 in research grants. It was our largest grant portfolio yet, and now, our plan is to continue to increase that, and then, part of beyond just giving the money, and we really create a community with the scientists that receive our grants. We call it our community for progress and providing mentorship opportunities for the junior scientists and bringing them together to share ideas and share their science so that we are really creating a community that is working together to change patient outcomes.

Sturgis: That sounds like an exciting opportunity for an oncologist who really wants to make an impact in pancreatic cancer.

Fleshman: Absolutely.

Sturgis: I know another way that you guys really work toward influencing and changing the future pancreatic cancer is the PALS Program. I know that clinical trials are so important. Can you tell us a little about that? How a patient can be enrolled, how a physician can be enrolled in that?

Fleshman: The Patient and Liaison Services or PALS Program is a comprehensive patient services program. Patients, families, and healthcare professionals can call in and talk to one of our trained staff members. It is like a call center that are there to answer their questions, anything that they are really looking for. So, if they are trying to find a specialist, we have a database of specialists who focus in pancreatic cancer. We have a clinical trial database, a comprehensive proprietary database of all of the pancreatic cancer clinical trials that are going on around the country and it is a searchable database. So, we can find trials that patients may be eligible for and then we can even



narrow that down to a specific geographical region depending on how far the patient wants to travel and we can also do a search for a healthcare professional. If they are looking for a trial to put their patient in we can do a search for that healthcare professional as well. We have a survivor and caregiver network; sometimes people just want to be connected to somebody else who is going through the same thing. Information on daily nutrition and pain management, you name it and we have got materials that have all been reviewed by our Medical Advisory Board for medical accuracy. Within 24 hours of the phone call with one of our PALS associates, we send out a comprehensive individualized patient educational packet based on that conversation and then it is a case management system. So, if a patient or family member calls back in, they are reconnected with the same PALS associate, the staff member that helped them the first time so that they can continue that conversation. It is really a wonderful program. The only one of its kind for pancreatic cancer and certainly an important aspect is that we recommend that all patients consider clinical trials when looking at their treatment options so that we are helping to increase enrollment in pancreatic cancer clinical trials and getting patients to the very best research that is available for them.

Sturgis: And that is one of your goals, right? To increase enrollment in the clinical trials program?

Fleshman: Exactly, that's again the only way that we are going to get to new treatment options for patient is to increase enrollment so that we can get to the answers faster and hopefully have new drugs for pancreatic cancer.

Sturgis: Sure. Can you give us some exact directions on how anybody who is watching this could access the PALS program? We will certainly have a link on Partners on Pancreatic Cancer to the PALS program, but for people who want to work directly with Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, go to your website, is there is a phone number? How do they access that information?

Fleshman: So, someone who is interested in getting involved or getting information from our Patient Services Program could go into our website at www.pancan.org, and they will find lots of patient information on our website and then also the phone number to call on to talk to somebody in our office. We have a toll free number **877-272-6226** that they can call, and the receptionist will get them immediately to the person that they need to speak with.

Sturgis: That is great. That is great, Julie, I think this is such an important time now. I think that as we look forward into the future, the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network is



doing such an amazing job that I think it made so many strides, so many important strides in this devastating disease. So, I know that everybody here thanks the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, and thanks you for all of your efforts in forwarding the research and the treatment of this disease forum.

Fleshman: Thank you, it is an exciting time, I think, in a pancreatic cancer scientific community. There is a lot of momentum, a lot more interest in the field, and we are just thrilled to be able to provide hope and information and resources to patient's families and healthcare professionals.

Sturgis: That's great. So, thank you again for watching this. Again, for any information about the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, please do visit www.pancan.org and thank you very much.

Fleshman: Thank you.