Penn Medicine

OCRC
OVARIAN CANCER RESEARCH CENTER

Dear Friends,

To say these last few months have seen a tremendous amount of change is an understatement. However, as we reflect on these changes, we take incredible pride at what will never change: our coming together as a community to improve the health and well-being of people facing ovarian cancer.

With your safety in mind, Penn Medicine has transformed the way we provide care in response to COVID-19, including new safety protocols to protect our patients and staff. Learn more about how we provide high-quality, personalized care in the safest possible setting in the video below from our Director of Penn's Abramson Cancer Center, Dr. Robert Vonderheide.

I have been deeply inspired by the way the Ovarian Cancer Research Center (OCRC) has stepped up throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The creativity, collaboration, and stamina on display have been nothing short of heroic.

Our clinical colleagues joined forces, our life-saving therapies never ceased, and our scientists in the OCRC continued to work tirelessly to advance ovarian cancer research — including the re-opening of our laboratories at 50% capacity.

Below is just one example of how our OCRC faculty are continuing the research that advances our field, so we can provide world-class, compassionate care.

Exciting New Research Leads to Clinical Trial

Fiona Simpkins, MD

While most ovarian cancers initially respond to standard therapy, many cases eventually become resistant to traditional chemotherapy and even more targeted treatments like PARP inhibitor therapy. PARP is a protein found in cancer cells that helps repair DNA, and when inhibited can cause cancer cells to die if they harbor a mutation in the BRCA genes.

Studies from Dr. Simpkins' lab at the Penn Ovarian Cancer Research Center (OCRC) recently showed that when tumors become resistant to PARP therapy, a new pathway becomes activated, the CHK1-ATR pathway. This pathway plays a major role in DNA repair and may hold the key to future ovarian cancer treatments.

In their findings, Dr. Simpkins and her team showed that PARP-resistant tumor cells are remarkably more sensitive to the combination of an ATR inhibitor plus a PARP inhibitor. This combination has shown marked tumor shrinkage and a significant increase in overall survival in animal model — including those with BRCA mutations and alterations in other pathways.

The results of this study, recently published in the prestigious journal *Nature Communications* has led to the CAPRI clinical trial at Penn Medicine. This is the first such trial of its kind in ovarian cancer and positive results would offer new treatment options for the many patients who suffer with recurrent and resistant disease.

2020 Virtual BREAKTHROUGH BIKE CHALLENGE

BENEFITING PENN MEDICINE'S ABRAMSON CANCER CENTER

Saturday, August 15 - Sunday, September 13

One of my favorite annual events, the Breakthrough Bike Challenge (BBC), has kicked off — and it's not too late to join us! **This year, the BBC has gone virtual – which means you can bike, spin, run, or walk your pledged miles on your own between Saturday, Aug. 15 and Sunday, Sept. 13.** One-hundred percent of the proceeds, including your $25 registration donation, support breakthrough research here at Penn!

Join me and the Penn Ovarian Cancer Research Center team! So far we have 14 members who have already raised $4,000 - but are still looking for other runners, walkers, bikers, and spinners to join the challenge!

ELLEN FITZGIBBON MEMORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

The Ellen Fitzgibbon Memorial Photography Competition was established in memory of Ellen Fitzgibbon — veterinarian, outdoor enthusiast, and photographer. Ellen used her artwork to raise awareness of ovarian cancer, the disease that took her life on June 8, 2018. Interested photographers are invited to submit nature photographs to compete for prizes of $1,000 and $1,500. Winning photographs will be donated to cancer hospitals (like Penn's) across the country, in keeping with Ellen's legacy of bringing "hope and beauty to those facing cancer." The application process opens on Sept.1, 2020, and the deadline for submissions is Oct.15. Winners will be announced on Dec.1.

The collective power of our community can overcome any obstacles, and that's what I am seeing today — forward momentum in science, exceptional clinical care, and generous donors who make it all possible. We are grateful.

Sincerely,

Ronny Drapkin, MD, PhD
Director, Ovarian Cancer Research Center