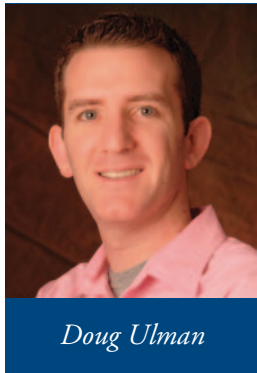


Patient Advocate Corner

The Lance Armstrong Foundation



By *Doug Ulman*

Over the years at the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF), I have had many opportunities to witness events that no one thought possible. I have seen a cancer survivor defeat the mountains of the Pyrenees and the high Alps to win a record number of Tours de France. I watched that same cancer survivor cross the finish line at the New York City Marathon.

Along the way, that cancer survivor, Lance Armstrong, continued to defy convention and expectations off his bike and out of his running shoes—all while redefining and embodying the word “survivor.” He founded and is the chairman of the organization I am proud to run. He is our largest donor, and he is an ambassador who has actively collaborated with the cancer community to fundamentally change the expectations and experiences of cancer.

And he has done this in the 11 years since his first doctors told him the late-stage testicular cancer that had spread to his lungs and brain would probably take his life.

These collective experiences and my own fight with cancer as a college kid have taught me to suspend disbelief, to actively campaign for what is impossible, and to hope when it is in short supply.

Even so, I will remember this year as being particularly unique and ground-breaking. In 2008, it is possible that cancer, a disease that affects every single American in some way, will finally and appropriately become a significant topic of discussion in a presidential election.

Despite the velocity and noisiness of the current campaign season, it is likely that even a voter who is barely paying attention knows what our candidates think about Iraq, terrorism, and taxes. But, until now, the same could not be said about cancer.

Clearly, our next leader in the White House should have a plan to fight cancer. Thus, the LAF and many supporting cancer organizations hosted the first-ever **LIVESTRONG** Presidential Cancer Forums in August 2007 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, creating a venue for candidates to share their thoughts and declare their intentions. Six Democratic and Republican presidential candidates participated in the forums. All participants committed to increase funding for the National Institutes of Health, and every candidate agreed that cancer screening must become more widely available. The candidates all conceded that our health care system is flawed and needs repair.

This is a critical time for the conversation. Cancer diagnoses are expected to rise significantly with our aging population. Cancer screening programs for low-income and uninsured women are reaching only 20% of the eligible population. Recent federal budget cuts mean that only one in 10 cancer research grants gets funded. Young researchers, discouraged by the odds, are abandoning cancer research for other fields. Data suggest cancer survival rates for young adults are not improving like they are for children and older adults. In fact, the 5-year survival rate for 30- to 35-year-olds has actually decreased since 1975.

Approximately 1.3 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer this year. They are loved and cared for by at least another million Americans. They will join the 10 million Americans already living with cancer today.

This group represents a diverse population that is facing a range of cancers and accompanying challenges from coast to coast. Nonetheless, they have a few important things in common.

First, they can count on the LAF and our partner organizations to support them in their fight—to fund research, support local programs, match them to clinical trials, and connect them with oncology social workers. They can count on us to provide the practical information and tools people with cancer need to live life on their own terms and work to close the gaps between what is known and what is done to prevent suffering and death due to cancer.

Second, they care about this issue and they vote. They can count on us to ask the candidates the questions that matter until Election Day.

When we began this effort to put cancer on the national agenda, we were often told that it was impossible. Experts said that the airwaves were crowded with too many other critical issues. Others said cancer is an old issue or certainly one that is too amorphous and complex. But we owe it to those we have lost and to those who will hear the words, “You have cancer” in the future to ensure that cancer is not ignored by our leaders. We owe it to them to suspend disbelief, to actively campaign for what is impossible, and to hope when it is in short supply—to do what they say cannot be done.

PLWC, ASCO’s patient information Web site, is pleased to collaborate with LiveSTRONG.org.

Doug Ulman is president of the Lance Armstrong Foundation. For more information about the Lance Armstrong Foundation, please e-mail: livestrongchallenge@laf.org or go to www.livestrong.com. PLWC, ASCO’s patient information Web site, is pleased to collaborate with LiveSTRONG.org.

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