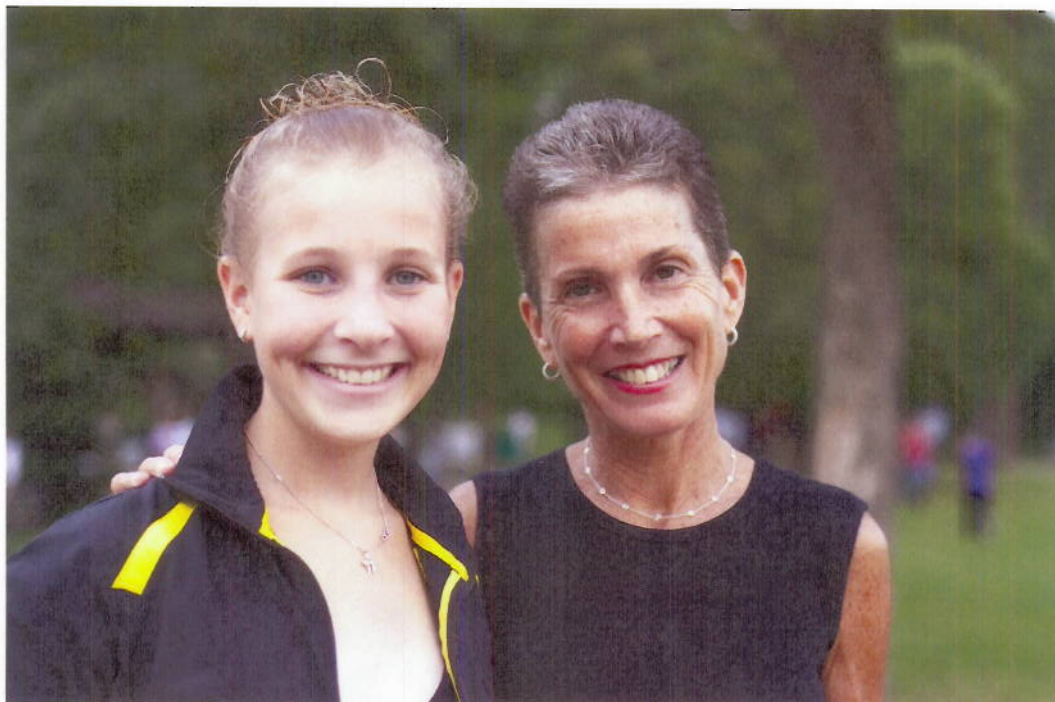


MEDILL REPORTS CHICAGO

Story URL: <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=157315>

Story Retrieval Date: 2/22/2010 9:03:00 PM CST



*Photo courtesy of Dr. Carol A. Rosenberg
Dr. Carol A. Rosenberg and her daughter, Yael "Yali" Derman.*

'From both ends of the stethoscope,' doctor helps cancer survivors plan for the future

by [Allison Stevens](#)
Feb 18, 2010

Imagine: You're 46 years old, and you have a husband and two young children. You hold a part-time job and juggle exercise and friends. If you stop there, your life sounds gratifyingly full.

Now tack a few new chapters onto your story. Endometrial cancer. Radiation therapy. Chemotherapy. Hysterectomy. Survival.

The cancer part of the story may have a happy ending, but where do you go from there? Even when the cancer's gone, getting back on your feet is a feat. You want to lose the weight you gained during treatment, gain back energy to be a mom, return to work and feel beautiful when you're with your husband again.

That's where Dr. Carol A. Rosenberg enters the picture.

Rosenberg may be a tiny woman – slight of frame and barely 5 feet tall – but she's a powerhouse doctor, researcher and mother.

She's worked for 22 years as an internist in Evanston while raising a family. She served on the faculty of Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine for 25 years and recently joined the faculty of the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine. She's the director of Preventive Health Initiatives at NorthShore University HealthSystem and has done groundbreaking research in women's cancer risk for the landmark Women's Health Initiative project.

But founding and directing the Living in the Future (LIFE) Cancer Survivorship Program at NorthShore University HealthSystem may outshine all her other accomplishments. The LIFE program – based at

suburban Highland Park Hospital but serving the all the NorthShore system hospitals – helps cancer survivors plan for life after treatment through personalized medicine. She's helping the newly-well return to normalcy.

The program has two major components. First, there's a one-time, one-on-one meeting with an oncology nurse where survivors develop customized health care plans and learn about resources that can jump-start living normally again. The other component includes a series of educational workshops and seminars that aim to educate survivors, family members and health care providers on the obstacles survivors face – from things like cognitive difficulties and intimacy issues to basic wellness tips on nutrition and fitness.

The program fills a deficit in programs and care for survivors that stems partly from the fact that early detection and better treatment are making the good news of survival more common.

"There was an absence of clarity about the roles and responsibilities for the management of the care for the long-term survivor, there was a lack of awareness about survivorship issues among the general public," says Rosenberg. "Even survivors don't understand survivorship because you haven't done it yet. It's like how do you know what married life is like or having a kid until you've had one?"

Rosenberg runs the program with Carole Martz, a registered nurse and the LIFE program clinical coordinator. Martz says that Rosenberg's work ethic, extensive cancer knowledge and vision are cornerstones of the program. Rosenberg's own daughter is a childhood cancer survivor, another fact that helped inspire Rosenberg to organize LIFE.

"We both share a similar vision for the care of cancer survivors and it's been a pleasure to find a soul mate in that," Martz says. "She's got all the energy behind it and it wouldn't be the same program without her."

The program began in November 2006 with a community education grant from the Lance Armstrong Foundation. Since its inception, the program has created customized survivorship care plans for close to 800 survivors and educated almost 4,000 survivors and family members through educational programs.

But what's nearly as impressive as the LIFE program is what drove Rosenberg to create it.

Growing up in the West Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago, Rosenberg lived in an environment that nurtured her interest in medicine.

"My parents were Holocaust survivors and they emphasized the value of saving a life," she says. "So I grew up in a culture of lifesaving values and the honorable kind of profession that being a physician was."

Her older brother and her college boyfriend (who would one day become her husband) were both in medical school during Rosenberg's undergraduate years at Northwestern University, and she credits them with further encouraging her to pursue medicine.

She completed her medical degree and internship at Northwestern as well, and had a successful residency at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in which she pursued clinical research. Her residency culminated with an article published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

"I was first author, which was pretty unheard of for individuals in their residency, so that was kind of like my claim to fame," Rosenberg says.

From there she was recruited to be the only female internist at a practice in Evanston – a fairly rare thing in 1983 but not now. The rest is history.

She continued to practice after she and her husband, Dr. Gordon Derman, a plastic and hand surgeon, had three children – Ari, 26; Ben, 22; and Yael, 19.

Rosenberg's third child, Yael or "Yali," born in 1990, was diagnosed with leukemia just before her fifth birthday. After a more serious recurrence in 2000, doctors determined Yali needed a bone marrow transplant.

Luckily, one of her older brothers, Ben – who is now a first-year medical student at Northwestern himself – was a match. So, at 12 years old, he donated his bone marrow to his sister.

“The months leading up to it I was excited about it because, usually, you’re helpless in these situations. But I could do something,” Ben says. “The physical bond we share now, that’s a bond not a lot of people have.”

Ben says the experience was a uniting period for his family. He also says it influenced his mother’s work.

“Things took on a little different significance after my sister got sick,” Ben says. “For my mom, it was a natural progression to working with cancer survivors.”

Rosenberg certainly seems to have been able to translate a difficult personal experience into a program that works for the greater good.

“There’s a big problem in terms of how do individuals make that transition from being a child who has cancer to, fortunately, being a cured adult?” Rosenberg says. “And how do you deal with the late effects of treatment?”

It was this combination of experiences that led NorthShore University HealthSystem officials to ask Rosenberg to design the LIFE program.

“I took all these perspectives, the personal, the clinical, the evidence-based, from both ends of the stethoscope, as I like to say it, and put together a program based on a need,” Rosenberg says. “Saving a life can have a lot of different contexts, not just providing drug therapy or physical remedies. My life really has evolved from pursuing medicine to save a life” to helping people live a life.

Related Links

[The Living in the Future Program Web site](#)[The Women's Health Initiative Participant Web site](#)