

SIGNS OF HOPE IN ADVANCED MELANOMA



Sally with husband Mike Reese

"To love and honor" are what Sally Blanchfield and Mike Reese are all about. Married for 18 years, they cherish each other, love their Boston Terriers Petey and Sparky, and share a vibrant passion for life. From the time they were confronted by advanced malignant melanoma, which is considered an incurable illness, Mike and Sally have remained on track in the face of extraordinary circumstances.

"We met in early 1986. We're more than just husband and wife," Mike says. "We're best friends."

Sally's metastatic melanoma was originally treated in 2000, and showed up again last year after she experienced abdominal pain.

"I was a sun goddess like no other," Sally says. "I loved the sun as a child and as an adult. But as a cancer patient, I wish I had not. Being diagnosed with this terminal disease was not only hard to believe, but it was a far cry from what Mike and I would have expected."

Sally is feeling healthy today, even after she had to stay in the hospital for a month with colitis and dehydration, the side effects of an experimental treatment that boosted her immune system.

"It almost killed me," Sally said of the treatment, which had to be cut short. "But without it I would have been dead right now. It's been a tremendous experience for me and my husband. Mike has been so supportive through our challenges."

Dr. Chen says that Sally's side effects weren't typical, but that her treatment is considered a success because she is now alive and healthy. Although it's impossible to say what Sally's future holds for her, "the melanoma is nowhere to be found right now," he says. "The new treatments bring about hope."

"People participate in clinical studies because they offer new options and because we need to find out about the new types of therapy," Dr. Chen says. "We need to see if they work and what the side effects are. It's the only way to pursue new treatment options and cures."

Mike is happy that his wife is back to health. "It was like a bad dream, and now she's doing well. I told the doctors they have their hands full with Sally. She's a fighter, and she proved me right. She's really tough," says Mike.

*"The treatment was all worthwhile.
I have no regrets and I'm happy to be alive right now."*

SALLY BLANCHFIELD



André K.D. Liem, MD

When asked about clinical trials, some people think they are for cancer patients who have run out of options with conventional treatment, and seek experimental treatment as their only hope for survival. "Although this can be the case, research offers much more," says Dr. André Liem, the director of clinical research at Pacific Shores Medical Group.

That's because clinical trials can offer the potential to extend or improve the lives of patients who are simply "looking for more treatment options." Cancer patients who take part in trials aren't the only people who can benefit: their doctors receive crucial information as well.

"Our physicians are made aware of new kinds of treatments and also gain experience with these medications before they are FDA-approved," Dr. Liem says. "This way we are kept up to date with the latest treatments, and can pass the knowledge to our patients."

Clinical trials also benefit future patients who can benefit from treatments that are under study today and may be approved tomorrow.

HOPE UNDER STUDY

Why Are Clinical Trials Helpful?

Pacific Shores Medical Group's patients have access to clinical trials from UCLA, as we are a member of the UCLA's Affiliated Translational Oncology Research Network. Patients who participate in clinical trials through this program are treated locally in our offices for their convenience.

In the right settings, clinical trials are helpful options for our patients. For instance, when no more conventional treatment is available and the patient desires to pursue further therapies, then a Phase I clinical trial may be appropriate. The purpose for these trials is to test very new drugs for dosage and safety, and they allow patients to potentially benefit from a new treatment that otherwise would not be available to them. As testing progresses to Phase II trials, more information on safety and efficacy is obtained.

Even when we do have "standard" treatments, clinical trials are still useful. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our treatment regimens. The only way to find out if a promising new drug is better than a standard drug is to compare them. These clinical trials are called Phase III clinical trials. If your Pacific Shores Medical Group physician thinks that one would be a good option, then he or she will inform you.

"We'll bring it up as an alternative. It's completely up to the patient," Dr. Liem says. "A patient has to be comfortable to go on a clinical trial as patients should be with any treatment. Patients can also get off a clinical

trial at any time. Also, if your treating physician thinks a clinical trial would not be appropriate, he or she will indicate that."

It is understandable that patients have questions about clinical trials. One of the fears is that patients will either receive an experimental treatment or an ineffective placebo. "That isn't the case," says Dr. Liem. "You'll get a treatment that's comparable to standard treatment, or you'll get standard treatment with extra medication that's under study. If a treatment is medically indicated, you will get a treatment: it would be unethical not to give people the best treatment," Dr. Liem says.

"We spend extra time with our patients on clinical trials. They often undergo extra tests and extra visits to doctors, which are done for safety and quality control purposes," Dr. Liem says.

"Most of the time the patients don't really mind the extra attention," Dr. Liem says. "Some find it more reassuring that they're being closely monitored."

Most of the patients say that they participate not only for their own benefit, but also to help patients in the future. Usually they mention their grandchildren, family, or friends. "I admire these people for their dedication," says Dr. Liem, "and I thank them on behalf of all the people who will benefit from their effort in times to come."

2007 ANNUAL CLINICAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Clinical Research: Why Is It Part of What We Do Every Day?



Irene de Jesus, Clinical Research Coordinator at Pacific Shores



André K.D. Liem, MD, Director Clinical Research Program

- The treatments we use today were experimental at some point; they are a result of clinical research.

- We do not have a perfect test or cure for every disease; we always need to improve.

- Our patients trust that we will do everything possible to help them, to give them hope.

- Our patients want us to be up to date, to know what's going on and what the best options are.