Piecing It Together: Solving the Puzzle of Cancer

By Mace Rothenberg

The first 2 months of my internship at Vanderbilt were spent on the Hematology-Oncology Service. These 2 months changed my life forever. I knew how sick cancer patients could be but for the first time in my career, I was responsible for their care. I saw the devastating impact that cancer had on their lives and on the lives of their family and loved ones. I was in awe of the strength and grace of patients fighting for their lives. I shared in their joy when they responded to treatment and despair when that treatment stopped working. Throughout, I was inspired by the hope that biomedical science and technology brought in the discovery and development of new and more effective treatments. Solving the puzzle of cancer transfixed me – and now, 35 years later, I remain as committed to that challenge as ever.

Today, I am no longer working as a lone intern in the hospital but as one of more than 5,000 colleagues at Pfizer dedicated to advancing new cancer treatments. And as a result of those efforts, we have made great progress against some of the most difficult cancers.

We’re innovating rapidly and aiming to translate scientific breakthroughs into clinical benefit for as many patients as possible across a wide range of cancers. This progress is evident at this year’s ASCO where more than 70 abstracts studying our medicines will be presented. This work extends across more than 15 major diseases and 12 mechanisms of action. It covers areas where we have more than a decade of experience, like renal cell carcinoma, and areas we are entering for the first time, like bladder cancer. With each of these advances, we are providing new hope for patients. And patients are at the center of everything we do.

We’re focusing our efforts in the areas where we believe we can make the biggest impact. Breast cancer, prostate cancer, hematologic malignancies and lung cancer continue to be priorities for us as we have both innovative therapies available to patients and new therapies in development.

Back when I was a clinical investigator, I saved letters from patients and re-read them on my most difficult days. Those letters inspired me. Now, next to my computer, I keep a scan of a lung cancer patient that shows the impact of one of our treatments, to remind me why our work matters. It’s working with a “Patients First” mind set.

No matter how large, no organization can conquer cancer alone. Years of work in this field have taught me that great science only comes through collaboration, aligned focus and commitment. That’s why we work with dozens of partners, in advocacy, academia, industry and government. For example, Pfizer is a founding partner of Project Data Sphere, a data-sharing platform helping to advance the pace of research.
Cancer is nothing if not an elusive enemy. It’s a puzzle that shifts just when you think you’re getting close to a solution. But, if we continue to find ways to deploy our collective strengths we’ll ultimately make a difference in the lives of the patients who need us most and redefine life with cancer.