

Fighting Ovarian Cancer One Step at a Time

Kelli Sargent, BA, MA

I lost my Mom three years ago to an eight-year bout with ovarian cancer that spread to her brain. I remember getting the news about her ovarian cancer like it was yesterday. It was the summer of 2000 and I had just finished my junior year of college. I was planning to go to London with one of my best friends to do an internship. That summer, before I left, my Mom was experiencing severe constipation and back pain. I didn't know this until later, but she also was experiencing other symptoms such as bleeding. Before we knew what it was, we all joked about the mineral oil the doctor suggested for her constipation and the 15 other natural remedies to get her system moving. My Mom had such a sense of humor and was a jokester most the time. My Mom already had been through stage IV Hodgkin disease with six weeks to live, so when she had defeated that, the thought of another cancer didn't seem even possible. My Mom and Dad encouraged me to go to London and assured me that everything was fine. I had that gut feeling it wasn't, but I got on that plane to London anyway.

A couple weeks into the trip, I got the phone call from my parents. I remember standing in the small living room of our London flat, facing the front porch and talking on the phone that sat on a small circular table. My parents told me it was ovarian cancer and I burst into tears. I felt so helpless being so far away and I was so scared. My parents encouraged me to stay and that everything would be fine. My Mom's oncologist for her Hodgkin disease had recommended Beth Karlan, MD, to do her surgery and assured us she was the best of the best. My Mom had her surgery and I stayed in London another couple of weeks but I felt so miserable being so far away. I just wanted to be with my Mom and family, so I ended my London trip early and came home.

For the next eight years, my Mom battled ovarian cancer like a true warrior and hero. She never complained. She even often said how ovarian cancer had "been kind to her." We all know that was because of the compassionate and extraordinary care she received from Dr. Karlan, Paula Anastasia, RN, MN, AOCN®, and the entire team at the Women's Cancer Program (WCP) at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute. Thanks to Dr. Karlan, she was able to experience a year here and there without having to do any treatment. She went to Switzerland with friends and traveled to Las Vegas and Hawaii—she had always lived life to the fullest and didn't want to let this cancer stop her.

I can't say enough about the oncology nurses. My mom always raved about the incredible care and love she received from all her nurses. As a patient, a nurse is someone you spend more time with than anyone else in the hospital. A nurse is who you call when you have a question, a concern, or just need a shoulder to cry on. I got to see firsthand what an extraordinary positive impact the nurses had on my Mom's health, well-being, and life as a whole. I am forever grateful to each and every one of them.

Running for a Reason

In 2002, I began my schooling to get my master's degree in sport management. For my thesis, I decided to create

a marketing and operations plan for a 5k run/walk for ovarian cancer. I am a runner, so I often did these events and recognized how effective they were in raising money and awareness for a cause. When my Mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, I learned that no reliable test exists for ovarian cancer. I also learned how the symptoms, such as constipation and bloating, often mimic

My Mom thought if she could bottle up the strength and love she received from others that it would be the best medicine ever.

those of other common conditions, so they often are missed by not only women, but doctors, too.

When I graduated, I decided I wanted to pursue putting this thesis into action. The most important part was establishing where I would want the money to go. With the care my Mom was getting from Dr. Karlan, Paula, and that entire WCP group, it was an easy decision. I pitched (and took my Dad with me) the concept to the vice president of community relations at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. It was a long shot because Cedars-Sinai had never done a public event before. To our grateful surprise, however, they agreed to partner up! Now, seven years later, run for her® has almost 5,000 participants and has raised almost \$4 million for the Cedars-Sinai WCP at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute.

Kelli Sargent, BA, MA, is the founder of the run for her® and the senior event coordinator in Community Relations and Development at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, both in Los Angeles, CA. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article. The content of this article has been reviewed to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the author or editorial staff.

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/11.CJON.567-568