

Cancer Survivorship Program

New program at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center empowers survivors for life after cancer.

Cancer survivors frequently recall two vivid memories: the moment they received their diagnosis and the moment they finished treatment. The end of cancer treatment often comes with a well-deserved sense of relief, accomplishment, and joy for persevering through a difficult experience. At the same time, the end of treatment can be accompanied by considerable stress and anxiety, with many survivors wondering, “Now what?” The new Cancer Survivorship Program at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center provides an answer to that question by helping patients and caregivers make a successful transition to life after cancer.



More adults are surviving cancer than any time in history. According to the American Cancer Society, currently one in twenty adults in the U.S.—approximately 15.5 million Americans—is a cancer survivor. That number is projected to reach more than 20 million by 2026. While this is welcome news, it is only part of the story. Many cancer survivors have persisting symptoms or are at increased risk for developing health problems caused or aggravated by the cancer treatments, also called late effects. Late effects facing cancer survivors may include pain or numbness, fatigue, muscle weakness, heart disease, bowel or bladder problems, and infertility. Access to health care, employment, school, and relationships may also be areas of concern.

Although there are a number of existing resources within the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center that can benefit cancer survivors, until now there has not been a central program that offers survivorship-focused medical assessment, education, and support. The Cancer Survivorship Program was created to fill that gap by helping survivors deal with symptoms, understand their risks, and take practical steps to improve their health. Leading this effort is David R. Freyer, DO, MS, professor of clinical pediatrics and medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and director of the Cancer Survivorship Program. Working closely with Dr. Freyer is Yasmeen Khan, PA-C, an experienced physician assistant who is equally passionate about the care of cancer survivors.

“With over 65% of adult cancer patients now attaining long-term survival, addressing the many health-related challenges they face following cancer treatment has become a priority, and one that is being highlighted by the National Cancer Institute. The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center is a top cancer hospital with eminent oncologists providing world-class cancer therapy. With the launch of our Cancer Survivorship Program, we can now partner with them to ensure that high standards extend across the entire spectrum of cancer care, including the post-treatment period,” Dr. Freyer says.

LIFE Cancer Survivorship Clinic

As part of the Cancer Survivorship Program, the LIFE Cancer Survivorship Clinic, or “LIFE Clinic”, was established in 2017 to provide survivorship-focused medical assessments, health-related information, and psychosocial support to patients who have completed cancer treatment. The LIFE Clinic was developed with input from oncologists at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and closely coordinates its services with those cancer treatment teams.

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Staffed by a team of specialists including a survivorship physician, physician assistant, and medical social worker, the LIFE Clinic offers a personalized evaluation. This includes a thorough review of their cancer history and treatment, a physical examination, discussion of current health and possible future risks due to cancer treatment, education on how to improve health and wellness, emotional and social support, and opportunities for participating in survivorship research. Referrals are made as needed to other medical specialists and services, such as physical, occupational, or nutritional therapy. After the visit, a detailed clinical summary is provided to the survivor, treating oncologist, primary care physician and other consultants to ensure there is close communication among all care providers and the patient. Currently, the LIFE Clinic operates every Friday at the Norris Cancer Center. Additional weekdays will be considered as the LIFE Clinic grows. Appointments typically last one hour. Cancer survivors treated elsewhere are also welcome.

“IN OUR VIEW, THE DEFINITION OF ‘CURE’ MEANS MORE THAN JUST BEING CANCER-FREE. CURE BEGINS WITH BEING CANCER-FREE, BUT GOES FAR BEYOND THIS TO INCLUDE RECOVERING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE AND APPROACHING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE, MEANING AND PURPOSE.”

– Dr. David R. Freyer

“Simply put, our goal in the LIFE Clinic is to make life better for cancer survivors. We strive to provide superior, survivorship-focused medical assessment and equip survivors with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to manage their health with confidence,” Dr. Freyer says.

Survivorship Research

Survivorship is now recognized as an essential part of managing cancer, but much research is needed to advance this field. Working with investigators in the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Keck School of Medicine of USC, the Cancer Survivorship Program provides a “home” for both cancer survivorship care and research to come together.

“There are many fundamental questions that remain unanswered. What are the most common long-term side effects of adult cancer treatments, how are they best detected and measured, and why do they develop in certain patients but not others? What are the problems that most impair quality of life? How can we prevent these late effects from happening and what are the best options for managing them? Enhancing this knowledge through research will help us design a more integrated and comprehensive survivorship program focused not only on the physical but also on the psychosocial needs of survivors,” Dr. Freyer says.

Keck Medicine of USC leadership has committed resources to initiate the Cancer Survivorship Program, but additional support is needed from our community in order to enhance these offerings. Philanthropy will help further enrich our psychosocial and wellness support, bolster development of our survivorship research database, and promote interdisciplinary research across USC and beyond.

“In our view, the definition of ‘cure’ means more than just being cancer-free. Cure begins with being cancer-free, but goes far beyond this to include recovering health and well-being to the greatest extent possible and approaching the future with hope, meaning and purpose. The LIFE Clinic is here to help make this a reality for as many patients as we can,” Dr. Freyer says.

To schedule an appointment or to learn more, please call Yasmeen Khan at (323) 865-3945 or email Yasmeen.Khan@med.usc.edu. If you are interested in supporting our Cancer Survivorship Program, we invite you to contact the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center Development Office, at (323) 865-0700 or email nordev@usc.edu.



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Donor Spotlight:

A night to remember with the LA Clippers

Patients of the Adolescent and Young Adult Program enjoyed a special night at the LA Clippers game thanks to USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center supporters Matthew and Deborah Irmas.



AYA@USC patients during a special meet and greet with Clippers players.

Last April, a group of 40 patients and guests from the Adolescent and Young Adult Program (AYA@USC) at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center had the opportunity to attend an LA Clippers game at the Staples Center. AYA@USC staff, donors, and co-medical directors, Dr. David Freyer and Dr. James Hu, were also in attendance. In addition to their game ticket, guests were treated to a special meet and greet with Clippers players and the chance to watch pre-game warm-ups courtside; they were also featured on the jumbotron.

The experience was generously gifted by the Audrey Irmas Foundation for Social Justice, a proud supporter of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and the AYA@USC program.

“As a family, we love going to the games. We wanted to share this experience with the AYA@USC family, many of whom had never been to a basketball game before,” Matthew Irmas said. “This was our way of helping these patients enjoy a fun night of community and friendship.”

For Matthew and Deborah Irmas, the gift goes hand in hand with what inspires their family’s foundation to give to the AYA@USC program in the first place. Their most recent donation is a multi-year pledge to support the AYA@USC Initiative in Resilience and Life Transitions, an initiative for adolescent and young adult cancer patients, led by Aura Kuperberg, PhD.

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A night to remember with the LA Clippers ...continued from page 3



The Irmas Family



Deborah and Matthew Irmas standing courtside with co-medical directors of the AYA@USC Program, Dr. David Freyer and Dr. James Hu



AYA@USC patients, faculty and staff enjoying lunch prior to tip-off

The AYA@USC Initiative in Resilience and Life Transitions is a program that specifically addresses the psychosocial needs of older teens and young adults battling cancer. It provides professional and legal advice and promotes ideas such as self-care, wellness, social competence, self-esteem, and communication skills. Program activities include family therapy sessions, patient retreats, resilience workshops, and wellness and educational seminars – all of which give patients the social opportunity to share common experiences and learn from one another.

“Cancer at any age is devastating, but it is especially difficult for pre-teens, teens and young adults. We wanted to focus our attention on addressing the psychological and social needs of these patients, which often get overlooked,” Matthew said. “Deborah and I love the work Aura is doing to raise awareness and resources for their cause. We believe supporting this program can go a long way to helping AYA patients live a life that is full and meaningful.”

The Clippers night was a great way for AYA@USC patients to bond beyond the clinical setting. For the patients and the AYA@USC staff, it was a day they would not soon forget. Matthew and Deborah enjoyed the experience so much that they hope to make it an annual tradition.

“It was heartwarming to see the expressions on everyone’s faces. Deborah and I firmly believe if you can cure the heart, you can help cure the body. We were happy to be able to share this with the AYA@USC family,” Matthew said.

For more information about the AYA@USC Program at the USC Norris cancer center, visit aya@usc.edu.

USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

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**Our mission is to make cancer
a disease of the past
by advancing and integrating research,
education, and personalized patient care.**