

January 31, 2003 – Quality of Life Clinic

Cancer Survivor shares tale of ‘fulfilling a need’

“There are a lot of issues regarding life after cancer that are unique to young adults. I founded this non-profit to fulfill that need.” Doug Ulman

When Doug Ulman was first diagnosed with cancer six years ago, he searched for programs aimed at young adults battling the disease. Unable to find any such targeted programs, the Brown University student took action and created his own resource for this group.

The result of his efforts – the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults – and the path he took in forming it was the topic of Ulman’s lecture at Dana-Farber on Sunday, Jan. 12. Delivered to an audience of fellow survivors and family members in the Smith Family Room, the talk was the first of the year sponsored by The David P. Perini, Jr. Quality of Life Clinic, DFCI’s multidisciplinary program for childhood cancer survivors.

After it was clear he was going to get through his first of three cancer diagnoses, Ulman’s focus shifted from “Am I going to die?” to “How am I going to live?” he explained. “It became a quality-of-life issue. I looked for a support group, and found that there were programs for children and elders, but not for young adults.”

With the help from his family, he established the Ulman Cancer Fund in 1997 to provide support programs, education and resources free of charge to young adults, their families, and friends who are affected by the disease. The Maryland-based non-profit organization also promotes cancer awareness and prevention and offers annual college scholarships.

“There are a lot of issues regarding life after cancer that are unique to young adults,” says Ulman, who has endured two bouts of melanoma and one of chondrosarcoma, a cancer of the cartilage. “These involve going back to school or your job, acquiring/affording insurance, developing social relationships, and fertility concerns. I founded this nonprofit to fulfill that need.”

In addition to his role as president of the Ulman Fund, he is director of survivorship at the Lance Armstrong Foundation, which supports cancer survivors of all ages through education, research and advocacy. Ulman says taking the latter job two years ago was the next logical step for him, since the foundation started by the champion cyclist who beat cancer is focused on the same issues as his own.

“Armstrong also believes there is an obligation for the cured to give back,” says Ulman. “Whether it’s speaking or sending a note to someone, there is always a role.”

Ulman’s talk was part of the “Saluting our Survivors” program hosted by Perini Clinic, a biannual event that allows childhood cancer survivors and their families the opportunity to meet and gather inspiration over brunch. The clinic’s next educational offering will be

“IMPACT: Spotlight on Hodgkin’s Disease,” at Saturday, Feb 1 workshop focusing on the long term effects of treatment for this condition.

“This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Perini Clinic,” says Perini Clinic Program Administrator Ellen Casey. “We were thrilled to have Doug Ulman and all our survivors at the event to help celebrate this milestone.”