Legacy gift propels endometrial cancer research

A s she bravely battled advanced endometrial cancer, Bina Sareen thought of women who would face the disease in the future. Wanting to have the most impact on fighting endometrial cancer, even as her own cancer advanced, Bina left a generous $384,000 gift in her estate plans to create the Bina Sareen Fund for Endometrial Cancer Research at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

“Bina resolved to help, in any way she could, others who would be diagnosed with this debilitating disease,” said Sarvajit Sareen, Bina’s brother. “Because very little is known about curing endometrial cancer, Bina wanted to promote research that would ultimately lead to finding a cure.”

Due to her interest in furthering research, Bina, a longtime teacher, met with physician-scientists from Dana-Farber. It became clear to Bina after her discussion with Ursula Matulonis, MD, chief of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology in the Susan F. Smith Center for Women’s Cancers and the Brock-Wilson Family Chair at Dana-Farber, and Panos Konstantinopoulos, MD, PhD, director of translational research in Gynecologic Oncology, that more studies were vital for a treatment breakthrough.

Bina’s generous legacy supported a groundbreaking study at Dana-Farber developing a possible immunotherapy treatment for endometrial cancer.

“Bina’s gift helped enable a clinical trial examining the efficacy of PD-L1 inhibitor avelumab on endometrial cancers with a genetic mutation,” said Konstantinopoulos.

“This is one of the first studies to bring immunotherapy to this subtype of the disease.”

Arbella and its employees fuel Institute’s mission

A rbella Insurance Group and its employees and agents continued their generous support of Dana-Farber and the Jimmy Fund in 2018, giving $250,000 to bolster cancer research and patient care. As the Official Auto Insurance Partner of the Jimmy Fund, Arbella sponsors events including the Jimmy Fund Scooper Bowl® presented by Valvoline Instant Oil Change, John Hancock Fenway Fantasy Day, Jimmy Fund Golf presented by Mohegan Sun, and the Boston Marathon® Jimmy Fund Walk presented by Hyundai.

Its philanthropic arm, the Arbella Insurance Foundation, is presenting sponsor of the annual WEEI/NESN Jimmy Fund Radio-Telethon. Bina Sareen furthers endometrial cancer research. They have made independent agents to support Dana-Farber and the Jimmy Fund through matching gift programs. Since 2008, the foundation, Arbella employees, and agents have contributed over $940,000 to the Jimmy Fund.

Arbella employees are involved with the Institute in a variety of ways throughout the year, most notably through the employee-driven Pink Day on October 16, an annual celebration to raise funds for Dana-Farber. Now in its 10th year, Pink Day began when a former Arbella employee was treated for breast cancer at Dana-Farber and rallied her colleagues to support the Institute’s mobile Mammography Van.

Pink Day now helps fuel the Blum Family Resource Center Van, which provides mobile skin cancer screenings and resources to underserved communities throughout Massachusetts. This summer, Arbella staff volunteered as the van visited three local beaches, providing an average of 50 screenings per location.

Arbella employees’ gifts during Pink Day are matched by the foundation, and over the years, the foundation and Arbella have given more than $270,000 to support these important community outreach vans.

Schussels provide pivotal funds for vital data analysis

S ince Sandi Schussel’s successful treatment at Dana-Farber for a rare T-cell lymphoma in 2015, she and her husband, George, have become active supporters of cancer research. They have made generous gifts supporting Dana-Farber research into breakthrough cures for lymphomas, and in August they appeared with Sandi’s oncologist, Matthew Davids, MD, MMSc, on the WEEI/NESN Jimmy Fund Radio-Telethon presented by Arbella Insurance Foundation to tell her story of success and encourage listeners to give.

Motivated by George’s professional expertise in database technology, the couple wondered whether gene sequencing, the resulting big data, and artificial intelligence could further progress in the conquering of cancer. “Because it’s now much more common for patients to get their tumors sequenced,” explained Dana-Farber’s David Weinstock, MD, “it’s important to look at a large set of samples and understand the frequency with which we find something that actually changes the treatment.”

Sandi and George’s most recent gift of $100,000 is helping Weinstock and his colleagues analyze a large set of gene sequencing samples, collaborating with investigators from multiple institutions to gain new insights into which gene abnormalities are important and targetable. “The Schussels provided seed money at a pivotal time,” said Weinstock.

“Sandi and I were both trained in the scientific method and have faith that understanding the human genome and its relationship to cancer will provide an important new boost to cancer therapies, thereby benefiting all of mankind,” said George.

To include Dana-Farber in your estate plans, contact us at 800-535-5577