Ronald H. Bloom

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“My children and I are all extremely pleased we’re able to do whatever we can to stop people from dying of lymphoma the way their mother did,” Bloom said about the gift. It was during his wife’s battle with the disease at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center when Bloom decided he would contribute to lymphoma research and advance a cure for the disease.

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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.
The Age Beautifully Cookbook

Award-winning cookbook author and fusion chef, Grace Mercado Ouano shares her inspiring cancer journey and her adventures as an always-curious food explorer.

As part of the Survivor Author Series, the USC-CSAC invited award-winning cookbook author and chef, Grace Mercado Ouano, better known as Grace O, to share her passion for cooking and her own cancer journey with the USC Norris cancer center community.

Grace has been cooking and baking all of her life. She got an early start as a child growing up in the Philippines, where she learned the culinary arts through her family’s cooking school. She became so well-versed in hospitality and the culinary arts that she eventually took over the cooking school at the age of 19. Grace rose to become a food trendsetter and successful businesswoman.

In 2013, Grace was diagnosed with uterine cancer. She turned to the care and treatment of gynecologic oncologist, Dr. Laila I. Muderspach, at the USC Norris cancer center. Grace shared that she went through a period of depression following her diagnosis, but she quickly turned those thoughts around into a renewed focus on a “food as medicine” philosophy.

Her father was a physician and taught her a great deal about diet and health, but it wasn’t until she did her own research that she learned much more about the effects of food on disease and aging. She was compelled to create a cookbook that incorporated the best nutrients known to fight the wear and tear of aging into easy, mouthwatering dishes that promote health and vitality. This led her to the publication of The Age Beautifully Cookbook, a hundred-plus recipe cookbook of inventive, great-tasting dishes made with fresh, nutritious, healing foods.

As she mentioned to the audience, eating well doesn’t mean sacrificing the foods you love or satisfying meals. Her recipes, although low in saturated fat, salt, and sugar, are high in flavor. Grace employs spices from all over the world to enliven her dishes, creating food that is different and delicious, while feeding your body with the right nutrients. Grace believes the foods we eat, exercise, and healthy habits can have a dramatic positive effect on the way we look and feel. She joked that even the most expensive creams on your body with the right nutrients. Grace believes the foods we eat, exercise, and healthy habits can have a

The discovery by Keck School of Medicine of USC researchers could ultimately lead to new therapies for liver cancer

A Keck School of Medicine of USC research team has identified how liver cancer stem cells survive. This finding may one day lead to new therapies for liver cancer, which is particularly significant because incidence rates for the cancer have been rising steadily.

“Liver cancer is difficult to treat, and most patients who are diagnosed with it will die within a five-year period,” said Jing-Hsiung James Ou, senior author of the new study and a professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at Keck School of Medicine of USC. “My team has identified how liver cancer stem cells are maintained. Without these ‘seeds of cancer,’ liver tumors would shrink and eventually disappear.”

New liver cancer cases increased 38 percent from 2003 to 2012, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Almost 23,000 people died from liver cancer in 2012. This marks a 56% increase in deaths since 2003.

The study, published in the journal, Molecular Cell, is an example of how Keck School of Medicine of USC researchers are finding biomedical solutions that in the distant future could improve medical treatments for patients. Dr. Ou believes these findings could be relevant to other cancers.

A way to sidestep disease resistance

Liver cancer is resistant to most chemotherapy drugs. Only three drugs have been effective in shrinking liver tumors, but tumors become resistant to the treatment quickly, according to the American Cancer Society.

Dr. Ou and his colleagues found that mitophagy, the removal of damaged mitochondria (the cell’s energy batteries), is a potential therapeutic target. Mitophagy can cause tumors to proliferate. That is because a powerful tumor suppressor called p53 attaches itself to mitochondria. Removing mitochondria inadvertently removes the body’s natural ability to keep tumors at bay.

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– Jing-Hsiung James Ou, PhD

If a lot of damaged ‘batteries’ are removed, then the tumor suppressor p53 will also be removed; more cancer stem cells will be created, resulting in more malignant tumors. However, if this cell cleaning process is temporarily halted, then the number of cancer stem cells will diminish. Without these seeds of cancer, tumors will regress until they no longer exist,” Dr. Ou said.

“Now that we understand the molecular process, we will be able to target this pathway to stop the production of cancer stem cells,” Dr. Ou said. “If cancer stem cells are gone, cancer is gone.”

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Event Spotlight:

What Changed the Way I Practice Medicine

USC medical oncologist, Afsaneh Barzi, MD, together with a panel of individuals who recently lost loved ones to cancer, discuss their experiences navigating the uncertain path of end-of-life decision-making.

As part of its Survivor Author Series, the USC Cancer Survivorship Advisory Council (USC-CSAC) invited members of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center community to a panel discussion on the topic of end-of-life decision making.

USC medical oncologist, Dr. Afsaneh Barzi, led the conversation, using a recent New York Times bestseller, When Breath Becomes Air, as a guide to discuss the challenges facing healthcare providers on how to confront the uncertainty that comes with end-of-life care.

As described by Dr. Barzi, When Breath Becomes Air is a riveting, personal memoir written by Dr. Paul Kalanithi, a young neurosurgeon who was diagnosed with stage IV metastatic lung cancer at the age of 35. Dr. Kalanithi uses the pages of the book to not only tell his cancer story, but also share his ideas on how to approach death with grace and what it means to be fully alive.

For Dr. Barzi, the book’s message changed her perspective on how she interacts with her patients and their family members. She shares that care must be a two-way conversation between physicians and their patients—a dialogue that doesn’t just take into account the next treatment or medication, but also involves a discussion of personal goals and the patient’s view of his or her quality of life.

“Patients ask ‘how long do I have to live’ not because they’re afraid of dying, but because they want to set goals for themselves. From a physician’s perspective, I want you, the patient, to help me understand your goals. Show me what your hobbies and interests are, because it will me help me present you with the best options,” Dr. Barzi emphasized.

Roxana Bellia, Alexandra Madrigal, and Emilio Olguin—panelists who recently lost loved ones to cancer—also joined Dr. Barzi on the panel. Each discussed the difficult conversations they had with their loved ones while dealing with their treatments and care plans.

Emilio Olguin, in particular, talked about his father, who recently passed away due to pancreatic cancer. “My dad’s last goal was to host a huge birthday party, where he could share how much his family and friends meant to him.”

Dr. Barzi ended the discussion by encouraging family members to cherish the time they have with their loved ones and to use it as an opportunity to set and accomplish personal goals.