



PROGRESS UPDATE

Forward4Tobi Foundation

March 2017



Dana-Farber Cancer Institute has been the top ranked cancer hospital in New England by U.S. News and World Report for 16 consecutive years, and is the only cancer center in the country ranked in the top 4 for both adult and pediatric cancer programs.

MAKING TREATMENT POSSIBLE BY EASING FINANCIAL STRAIN

Cancer impacts every aspect of a patient's life, and the stress can be overwhelming. Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's Patient and Family Assistance Program, led by **Deborah Toffler, MSW, LCSW**, Director of the Division of Patient and Family Programs and Services, offers a number of financial and supportive resources that reduce the burden of these stresses and allow patients to focus on what is most important: their well-being. With your support, the Patient and Family Assistance Program has helped our patients and families to regain their footing so that they can focus on their care, and we are grateful for your generosity.

Over the past year, the **Forward4Tobi Patient Assistance Fund** provided critical support to 195 patients through patient assistance funds and the Crisis Fund. The following examples highlight how your gift helped to give these patients peace of mind so that they could focus on their treatment. In this report, we also highlight other updates in the Division of Patient and Family Programs and Services made possible by the generosity of donors like you.

PATIENT ASSISTANCE FUNDS BRIDGE THE GAP

During treatment, costs can quickly deplete savings accounts and outpace income. Because no patient should have to choose between buying food and keeping medical appointments, Dana-Farber's dedicated Resource Specialists are there to help patients obtain benefits through governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as receive internal patient assistance funds. These funds are made available entirely through philanthropy.

Melanie

Before being diagnosed with breast cancer, Melanie, age 37, helped to support her retired parents. When her treatments left her unable to work and with her paid sick leave coming to an end, Melanie faced the prospect of no income. Until the family could begin to receive benefits for which they were eligible, Stop & Shop gift cards helped to put food on the table and relieved anxiety during this stressful time.



Deborah Toffler, MSW, LCSW,
Director of Patient and Family
Programs and Services

Kayla

Kayla, a mother of three children under the age of five, had to stop working when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. The young family was soon barely able to make ends meet. Stop & Shop gift cards helped them to put food on the table, easing financial strain so that Kayla could focus on her treatment.

Alex

Alex, a breast cancer patient in her early 30s, has three children, ages 3, 5, and 6. Alex was treated for cancer last year, but the disease recurred within six months and her prognosis is poor. Alex has been unable to work since her diagnosis and her partner is on permanent disability. Alex's parents have moved in to help, allowing her to spend as much time with her children as possible. Patient assistance funds helped alleviate the stress of payment for groceries, providing critical support during this challenging time.

Caroline

When Caroline, a wife and mother of two young children, was diagnosed with cancer, she left one of her two jobs to receive treatment. Her medical team, concerned about her weight loss and its impact on her treatment, prescribed dietary supplements, but Caroline could not afford them and took less than the prescribed amount. Patient assistance funds covered the cost of Caroline's supplements.

CRISIS FUND FORESTALLS EMERGENCIES

In 2015, the Patient and Family Assistance Program established a Crisis Fund to give up to \$1,000 per year to eligible patients who face significant stress that threatens treatment or recovery. These stories illustrate some of the ways in which patients benefitted from the **Forward4Tobi Patient Assistance Fund**.

Samantha

When Samantha, a patient in her early 60s, was diagnosed with breast cancer, she moved to Massachusetts to live with her brother so that she could be treated at Dana-Farber. Although she was approved for a housing subsidy, she could not afford to furnish the apartment. Thanks to the Crisis Fund, Samantha was able to purchase a bed and mattress.

Anna

Anna's treatment regimen for breast cancer required a very expensive medication, but when her Medicare insurance entered the coverage gap, the drug became unaffordable. The drug manufacturer determined that the patient's income, although low, exceeded their income guidelines. The Crisis Fund paid for the remaining balance so that her medication was once again affordable.

Karen

Karen, a breast cancer patient in her early 50s was behind on her rent, and without immediate payment would soon received an eviction notice. She was overwhelmed. The Crisis Fund enabled the patient to pay her rent, earning her good will with her landlord to remain in her home.

Eliana

Eliana, a breast cancer patient in active treatment, is a single mother of two young children. Eliana had to stop working due to her treatment, and could not afford a transportation service to bring her to Dana-Farber every day for her six-week regimen. The Crisis Fund helped to cover the cost of transportation so that Eliana could receive the care that she needed.

SEASONAL GIVING BRIGHTENS HOLIDAYS

The holidays can be particularly overwhelming and stressful for those who are dealing with cancer treatment. The Seasonal Giving program, which began as a small donor-funded program helping 10-15 patients, quickly grew as social workers and resource specialists noticed growing needs in the patient population.

Eight years ago, a Dana-Farber staff member suggested that employees sponsor patients with limited financial resources—and the program is now fueled by Dana-Farber employees and external donors, with the goal of giving patients gift cards to purchase gifts, gas, and food for themselves and their families. The following examples highlight how the Seasonal Giving program made a difference for patients and families.

Lisa

As Lisa, a breast cancer patient in her mid-30s, was undergoing treatment, she relied on her mother to help care for her children, ages 3 and 7. When Lisa's mother was also diagnosed with cancer, Lisa's husband had to take time off work to transport both women to their appointments, adding financial strain to the already stressful situation. Thanks to Seasonal Giving funds, the family was able to purchase groceries for their holiday meal and toys for the children.

Louisa

After her cancer diagnosis last year, Louisa spent time recovering from her surgery while her husband cared for their three children. Although Louisa attempted to return to work, the side effects from treatment made it impossible. The family was unable to afford school clothes for their children. Seasonal Giving funds helped to bridge the gap for this struggling family during the holidays, allowing them to celebrate like other families in the children's school.

COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER

Each year, Dana-Farber sees more than 50,000 new patients at its Longwood campus, and these numbers are growing. Many of these patients, particularly those who are most vulnerable, confront a range of non-medical challenges that can seriously impair their ability to receive treatment. As part of the Patient and Family Assistance Program, Dana-Farber offers resources to help eligible patients resolve legal and financial issues.

Boston lawyers resolve issues and promote self-advocacy

Cancer patients and their families, especially those with moderate to low incomes, frequently experience legal difficulties regarding their employment rights, insurance coverage, housing, estate planning, and eligibility for Social Security benefits. Very often, they do not realize that legal assistance could help them to resolve these issues, enhance their treatment, and ease their anxiety. Access to pro bono legal services through Dana-Farber's partnership with Medical-Legal Partnership | Boston (MLP) helps patients to navigate these challenges so they can focus on their medical care and quality of life. In addition to providing legal counsel directly, MLP | Boston attorneys coach

social workers and patients through common legal situations, enhancing their legal knowledge, building confidence, and empowering them to advocate for themselves.

As a way to make legal knowledge available to all patients, MLP | Boston collaborated with the Patient and Family Assistance Program to create teaching sheets that cover their rights as patients and how to apply for government benefits, food assistance, and permanent housing. Available on the internet, the teaching sheets answer specific questions related to cancer treatment that patients can use as scripts to help them fill out applications and navigate phone calls.

Financial planning program becomes national model

The Financial Planning Association of Massachusetts, a professional organization for certified financial planners, has been providing pro bono counseling to Dana-Farber patients and families since 2008. In the past year, 23 patients were referred to planners for help with issues such as debt management and estate planning. This long-running program is becoming a national model for financial planners across the country. Toffler is consulting with the Foundation for Financial Planning to advise them on their initiative to expand this program on a national level.


FINANCIAL STRAIN AFFECTS SYMPTOMS, QUALITY OF LIFE

A body of research clearly demonstrates that financial stress can cause cancer patients to miss medical appointments and forego purchasing medications. Dana-Farber researchers **Christopher Lathan, MD, MS, MPH**, **Reggie Tucker-Seeley, ScM, ScD**, and **Deborah Schrag, MD, MPH**, have demonstrated that financial strain impacts quality of life and is correlated with increased symptoms, including pain, depression, and anxiety. These consequences have long-lasting impact and may ultimately affect survival.

In an examination of patient-reported data from a national survey of 5,000 patients with colorectal and lung cancer, investigators found a consistent association between greater financial strain and lower quality of life (QOL) in terms of both physical and mental well-being. Financial strain was measured by asking patients how many months they could live on their current savings if they lost all sources of income; and the results showed that those reporting



Christopher Lathan, MD, MS, MPH, Medical Director, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center; Faculty Director for Cancer Care Equity



fewer months that savings could cover their expenses also reporting lower QOL, more pain, and more symptom burden.

Among patients with lung and colorectal cancer who participated in the survey, 40 percent and 33 percent, respectively, had less than two months in savings on which to live. One year later, those patients fared worse in terms of overall health and activities of daily living, and experienced more pain and depression than patients who had reported 12 months or more in financial reserves. Published in the May 2016 *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, this study lays the foundation for the development of interventions that can help identify patients who may need immediate support in applying for financial assistance as they navigate cancer care, thereby improving health and financial outcomes throughout survivorship, easing suffering, and averting a crisis such as homelessness.

Dr. Tucker-Seeley also published an editorial in the January 2016 *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* that called for advancing research to expand the understanding of policies and factors that drive financial strain, and to develop evidence-based interventions to alleviate it.

YOUR IMPACT

Thank you for the **Forward4Tobi Foundation's** support of the Patient and Family Assistance Program at Dana-Farber. Your partnership helps us to provide essential resources to our most vulnerable patients, easing their financial burden and allowing them to focus on treatment. On behalf of our patients, families, and staff, we extend our deep appreciation for this generosity.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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10% of all designated gifts will support our Faculty Research Fund to advance Dana-Farber's research mission.