

Cancer survivors and supporters gather at Cedars-Sinai's annual event to celebrate

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Lee Wolinsky admits she was too busy climbing ladders to stop and smell the roses.

"I was constantly running-;through the airport, to meetings, to classes I taught," she said.

A former sales development manager and trainer, Wolinsky found herself moving up the corporate ladder quickly. But in February 2017, concerns over meetings and flights took a back seat to a greater challenge: She was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"It forced me to seriously assess my life," she said.

Wolinsky was one of three guest speakers who shared their survival stories at Cedars-Sinai's 32nd annual Cancer Survivors Day Luncheon. The June 8 event drew more than 400 cancer survivors and supporters who filled the spacious Guerin Pavilion at the Skirball Cultural Center.

As speakers told their stories, some of which are excerpted below, survivors in the audience clapped, laughed, nodded their heads in agreement and, from time to time, wiped away a tear.

- Jonathan Tavss, on the challenges of supporting his wife Elise through her recovery after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015: "There is no guide at all that can prepare you for the sights and sounds of a loved one

going through cancer treatment...The craziness becomes even bigger with small children around. People never want to face a choice of caring for a wife or shielding kids from something that is both human and scary. When Elise crumbled to the floor one night during her treatment, I quickly chose to wrap my arm around her, while talking my kids through it. If that memory sticks with them, I hope it ingrains in them the lesson of being there for the people you love – regardless of the crazy and despite the scary. In the case of my kids, I think they are ultimately much stronger and compassionate beings after these experiences.”

- Wolinsky, on life after cancer treatment: “Now, a year later, my health is much improved. That gut-punch reality check of a cancer diagnosis gave me the opportunity to take stock of my life. I am now consulting clients on a limited basis, and make sure I carve out time daily to make healthy meals -; thanks to my husband, Leo, who does all the grocery shopping -; and I do Pilates three times a week – and love it. I also call friends to give or get support. This regimen helps me keep healthy-;physically and emotionally.”
- Robert Figlin, MD, director of the Hematology Oncology Division and deputy director of the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute, on patient outcomes: “I’m often asked my definition of survivorship. My answer is this: All cancer patients and their families go through a journey and survive that journey. It can last a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade or 20 years. Every person on that cancer journey should take credit for what they’ve accomplished, and not focus on a specific date of accomplishment. “As cancer doctors, our job is to give patients the best possible outcome. And looking out at this audience, I feel proud that I get to contribute to that process.”

Source:

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