

# 21-Year Pancreatic Cancer Survivor, Roberta Luna to be Honorary Starter for the 26th LA Cancer Challenge

As the Hirshberg Foundation brings our vibrant community of supporters and fundraisers together for the [26th LA Cancer Challenge](#), we are thrilled to share that this year's Honorary Starter will be 21-year pancreatic cancer survivor, Roberta Luna!

For two decades, Roberta and her beloved husband Vic have been on a crusade to give back to their community and to embrace patients and caregivers going through a journey that the Lunas know all too well. "Through my experience with this horrific disease, I believe I am here to help those who have also been affected by pancreatic cancer, to hopefully inspire them and give them much needed hope." Putting her beliefs into action, Roberta is a volunteer, activist, patient advocate, guest speaker at awareness events and survivor panelist at the Hirshberg Foundation's Symposium for Pancreatic Cancer. This year we are thrilled to welcome her as our LACC Honorary Starter, and we invite you to [register and join us](#) too!

Over the years, Roberta has shared her harrowing story of how pancreatic cancer took her father, her mother and her uncle before impacting her own personal health by her early 40's. "I decided then and there I wasn't going to die; I was going to fight this with everything I had." Every step of the way, Roberta has stood strong as an advocate for patients. Most recently, she has given a voice to fellow survivors through her podcast: [Living Hope; Your Journey with Pancreatic Cancer](#).

Living Hope is a weekly podcast sharing the real-life journeys of those affected by this disease. Her goal is to educate, raise awareness, provide hope, and a spark of inspiration for survivors and caregivers. The [Living Hope](#) podcast is also a returning sponsor of the LA Cancer Challenge this year.

Today, Roberta instills hope in newly diagnosed patients and long-term survivors alike. “Hopefully, you find inspiration from my story about how, through the good, the bad and the ugly, we can weather the storm with the support of our loved ones, our family, ‘our purple family’ and the many people we meet along this often-difficult journey.”

We are honored and humbled to call her a friend of the Foundation. As the Hirshberg Foundation shares its LACC mantra to “Fight to the Finish,” there are no better words than a quote Roberta shared years ago. “As I lace up my purple boxing gloves for the 19th time, I challenge pancreatic cancer to put on its gloves and prepare for the next round...I am still standing and I’m not giving up!”

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## **Momentum Newsletter: Summer 2023**

Summer is in full swing, and we have research updates to share plus great ways to get involved in making a difference for the pancreatic cancer community. Our events continue to unite a community passionate about a cancer-free future and ensure that we can continue to fund research that drives us towards that goal. As our [25th year](#) concludes, we remain steadfast in

offering hope with the motto, “Never Give Up! Finding a cure is worth fighting for.”

## **UCLA Activity Summary Report**

A true highlight from our UCLA program is that the [UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases](#) is moving to a beautiful new space where patients and their loved ones can receive holistic, state-of-the-art care in one central location. This new space enhances a key pillar of our mission and we can't wait to share it with you! Our newest program at UCLA is the Nutrition for Safer Surgeries developed by [Shelby Yaceczko](#), a highly skilled dietician. The program provides patients with medical nutrition services to enhance quality of life during cancer treatment. The Robotic Surgery program is also of special interest. Led by Dr. Mark Girgis, a past Seed Grant recipient, the Robotic Surgery program continues to gain momentum. The minimally invasive technique improves long-term recovery prospects and expands the patient population eligible for surgery. Together, these programs are improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

[Read the Report →](#)

## **New NCCN Guidelines for Pancreatic Cancer**

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) brings together top cancer centers across the United States to improve cancer care through their vast collection of Guidelines for Patients. The latest version of the [Guidelines for Patients: Pancreatic Cancer](#), sponsored by the Hirshberg Foundation, provides

information to help patients and their families navigate a pancreatic cancer diagnosis in an empowered and informed way. The Hirshberg Foundation is proud to support this great work to ensure that all patients and caregivers receive the most up-to-date information to assist them through their cancer journey.

[Learn more and get your copy →](#)

## **UCLA Joins the Pancreatic Cancer Early Detection (PRECEDE) Consortium**

Dr. Timothy Donahue has joined the Pancreatic Cancer Early Detection (PRECEDE) Consortium as a Principal Investigator, allowing UCLA patients with a family history of pancreatic cancer or individuals who carry pathogenic genes to be able to enroll for longitudinal follow up. This [Consortium](#) brings together an international, multi-institutional collaborative group of experts with the aim to increase the 5-year survival rate from 10% to 50% in the next 10 years. The Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases and UCLA's involvement in this study will help maximize identification and advance early detection of pancreatic cancer. We are hopeful that this collaborative project will lead to great strides in early detection so that we may see a marked increase in survival rates.

[Read more about PRECEDE →](#)

## **The 26th LA Cancer Challenge 5K is October 22, 2023**

Our signature event, the [LA Cancer Challenge 5K Walk/Run](#) is on

October 22nd and registration is now open. The LACC brings our mission pillar to “unite generations, young and old, through physical fitness to raise awareness for pancreatic cancer” to life. Each year we gather at UCLA and in communities across the globe to make a difference for those facing pancreatic cancer. Join us [in-person](#) at UCLA or [virtually](#) from wherever you are, and know that your participation helps us take strides towards a cure.

[Register Today →](#)

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## **UCLA Joins the Pancreatic Cancer Early Detection (PRECEDE) Consortium to Transform Early Detection and Survival Rates**

Dr. Timothy Donahue, Director of the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases and Garry Shandling Chair in Pancreatic Surgery at David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, has joined the Pancreatic Cancer Early Detection (PRECEDE) Consortium as a Principal Investigator. This Consortium brings together an international, multi-institutional collaborative group of experts with the aim to increase the 5-year survival rate from 10% to 50% in the next 10 years. With Dr. Donahue as a Principal Investigator, UCLA patients with a family history of pancreatic cancer or individuals who carry pathogenic genes will be able to

enroll in the PRECEDE study for longitudinal follow up.

The PRECEDE Study is an observational long-term study of people with an increased risk for pancreatic cancer due to family history, a history of chronic pancreatitis or pancreatic cysts, or the presence of specific gene mutations linked to the disease. Study participants have blood work every 6 to 12 months with additional imaging collected for those in defined high-risk groups. This data-driven model integrates basic, translational and clinical research to greatly enhance our understanding of this disease and to drive early detection and prevention methods. The consortium aims to identify high-risk individuals, create an effective early detection test for pancreatic cancer, understand the risk factors, including susceptible genes, and develop a strategic pancreatic cancer prevention plan. As Dr. Donahue told us, "It is critical for high-risk individuals to join this important study in order to maximize identification and advance early detection of pancreatic cancer. Early detection would drastically change the trajectory of the disease and ultimately save thousands of lives."

The Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases and UCLA's involvement in this study will expand the population of high-risk individuals involved and allow family members of patients to participate in deepening our knowledge of pancreatic cancer risk factors. We are hopeful that this collaborative, multi-institution project will make early detection and prevention for pancreatic cancer accessible for all so that we may see a marked increase in survival rates.

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# An Overview of the Updates to the NCCN Guidelines for Pancreatic Cancer

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) works to improve cancer care through their vast collection of Guidelines for Patients. The latest version of the [Guidelines for Patients: Pancreatic Cancer](#), sponsored by the Hirshberg Foundation, provides information to help patients and their families navigate a pancreatic cancer diagnosis in an empowered and informed way.

The extensive guidelines include care options, treatment protocols, quotes from patients, advice for how to discuss treatment with doctors, and much more. The Guidelines for Patients are based on the recommendations in the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology available to [physicians](#). One of the most recent updates included for patients is the addition of a new first-line therapeutic option, liposomal irinotecan + 5-FU + leucovorin + oxaliplatin (known as NALIRIFOX). This new drug regime has shown promise in early-stage trials conducted by [Dr. Zev Wainberg](#), a member of the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases, Professor of Medicine at UCLA and co-director of the UCLA GI Oncology Program.

Another highlight of the updated version is the recommendation that all individuals diagnosed with pancreatic cancer have genetic testing for a range of inherited mutations. The advice is to screen beyond just *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* to look at an array of mutations that can assist with treatment planning. There is also an expanded section on biomarker profiling for advanced and metastatic pancreatic cancer which can provide a molecular

profile of small yet important features of the cancer. Biomarkers detect abnormal changes in cancer cells' genes that occurred during your lifetime and may also help with treatment planning.

An update that we are excited to focus on is the whole-body approach to treatment that is emphasized in the latest Patient Guidelines. The Hirshberg Foundation has long advocated for a holistic method of treatment that takes into consideration the [mind-body connection](#). The newest updates include details on [supportive care](#) that is recommended from the point of diagnosis. Treatment options have also taken on the best-practice of a more individualized approach based on individual and cancer specific characteristics.

The Hirshberg Foundation is proud to support this great work to ensure that all patients and caregivers receive the most up-to-date information to assist them through their cancer journey. The NCCN Guidelines for Patients booklet is available for [digital download](#) or to purchase through [Amazon](#).

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## **The 2022 UCLA Activity Summary Report**

The [UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases](#) continues to be one of the nation's leading institutions for pancreatic cancer research, diagnosis, and treatment thanks to funding from the Hirshberg Foundation and our supporters. As we celebrated our 25 years of progress, we were elated to see the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer jump to 12 percent, a huge

increase from the five-percent five-year survival rate of 1997, when we began. It is thanks to our fundraising events and our donors that we have been able to advance research, improve patient outcomes, and take these crucial steps towards a cancer-free future.

Each year, UCLA provides the Hirshberg Foundation with a [detailed report](#) of the progress that is possible thanks to our partnership. Below are updates on the important work taking place at UCLA.

## **UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases**

The Hirshberg Center is moving to a brand-new space on the top floor of 100 Medical Plaza on the UCLA campus. With state-of-the-art accommodations for patients and their loved ones, this larger space will be optimized to provide the uncompromising care the center is known for. Overseeing the development of this incredible space as the new Director of the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases, [Dr. Timothy Donahue](#). The new space will unite the Integrated Practice Unit's (IPU) team of specialists under one roof for enhanced collaboration among different departments and care areas. Currently all IPU pancreatic cancer patients undergo genetic testing, allowing the team to tailor treatment with new drugs that can target identified genetic alterations. Input from multiple disciplines on each patient's case allows clinicians to deliver exceptional comprehensive care that is disease- and patient-specific. This new location will provide a beautiful healing space for patients to receive world-class care.

# Nutrition for Safer Surgeries

Nutrition for Safer Surgeries is a new program at UCLA funded by the Hirshberg Foundation. Developed by Shelby Yaceczko, MS, RDN-AP, CNSC, CSSD, an advanced practice dietician at UCLA and [speaker](#) at our 17th Annual Hirshberg Symposium on Pancreatic Cancer, the program provides early nutrition assessment and intervention for any patient with a new or existing gastrointestinal cancer diagnosis, with a special focus on pancreatic cancer. Medical nutrition therapy services can prevent or correct nutritional deficiencies, enhance quality of life during cancer treatment, and minimize treatment's side effects. Research has shown that perioperative nutrition evaluation and optimization are essential to the success of pancreatic cancer surgery and result in decreased morbidities and mortalities. A member of the IPU, Yaceczko consults with patients before surgery to improve surgical outcomes.

## Robotic Surgery at UCLA

A 2016 Seed Grant recipient, Mark Girgis, MD, continues to advance robotic surgery at UCLA. [Dr. Girgis](#), Director of Robotic Surgery and Assistant Professor of Surgery, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, has helped robotic surgery gain momentum in the treatment of pancreatic disease. The minimally invasive technique improves long-term recovery prospects due to decreased healing time which allows patients to begin post-surgery chemotherapy sooner. The robotic surgery expertise of Dr. Girgis and his team enables them to expand patient populations eligible for surgery, regardless of complications and disease stage. The popularity of robotic surgery is on the rise with both patients and surgeons, and we are optimistic that this treatment option will improve patient care.

# Clinical Trials for Treatment

Clinical trials are a crucial step in the development of effective therapies for pancreatic cancer. Many patients also benefit from participation in a clinical trial as part of the treatment. Patients seen through the Hirshberg Center's IPU have access to an array of treatment options including the 19 [clinical trials](#) currently in progress at [UCLA](#). Plus, the UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium is currently running over 46 clinical trials focused on pancreatic cancer. These clinical trials not only help advance understanding of this disease, but they also offer patients and their families hope for better treatment options. The Hirshberg Center's vast offerings of clinical trials for promising treatments put it at the forefront of pioneering translational research.

The Hirshberg Foundation's partnership with UCLA has created a premiere pancreatic cancer center with cutting-edge research and world-class care that draws patients from across the country. Together we are making progress toward improved treatments, outcomes, and quality of life for patients with pancreatic cancer. We are hopeful that we can watch research progress accelerate towards a cancer-free future.

[Read the full summary here →](#)

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## Exciting Changes to the

# Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases

We are seeing the seeds we planted 25 years ago with the creation of the Foundation come to full bloom. A pillar of our Foundation mission was *“to create premier Pancreatic Cancer Center where all needs of pancreatic cancer patients can be met in one location with the most advanced treatment options.”* That dream is now the [UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases](#) and it is moving to a beautiful new space. We’ve had a celebratory sneak peek and look forward to sharing more when the Center opens this summer. This gorgeous new space will offer patients and loved ones world-class integrative care in one convenient location.

As we prepare for the new space, we are honored to welcome [Dr. Timothy Donahue](#) as the new Director of the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases. Dr. Donahue is the Garry Shandling Chair of Pancreatic Cancer Surgery, Chief of the Division of Surgical Oncology, and Program Director of the General Surgery Residency at UCLA. He is an expert in the treatment of pancreatic disease and oversees a NIH funded research program focused on pancreatic cancer. With Dr. Donahue as the Director and [Dr. Joe Hines](#) as Chair and Executive Medical Director of the Department of Surgery, our pancreatic cancer program at UCLA is in the most capable hands so that all patients can receive best in class care.

Taking the helm of our Scientific Advisory Board will be esteemed researcher, [Dr. Miklos Sahin-Toth](#). Dr. Sahin-Toth has lead his namesake lab at UCLA since 2019. A world-renowned expert in the area of the pancreas disorders with a focus on genetic risk factors in chronic pancreatitis, Dr. Sahin-Toth

brings a fresh perspective and talent as Chair of the board, particularly as we look towards the future. For the past 25 years we have invested in progress. Now, we look toward the next 25 years filled with hope for all that is to come.

These exciting changes are possible thanks to those equally invested in our motto, "Never Give Up: Finding a Cure is Worth Fighting For."