

Esther Lee Shares Her Pancreatic Cancer Journey

We are delighted to have Esther Lee, DPT, as our Honorary Starter for the 2021 LA Cancer Challenge Walk/Run. The LACC Honorary Starter is a special honor we bestow each year on a pancreatic cancer survivor who has shown great courage, strength and positivity throughout their cancer journey.

Diagnosed in July 2020 with stage IV [pancreatic neuroendocrine](#) tumor with metastasis, Esther faced a long and bumpy treatment journey that she is still on. Through it all she exemplifies grace and expresses gratitude every step of the way. In Esther's own words, "I've truly learned to take it one day at a time, the greatest challenge being fully present in each day, moment by moment... this is the amazing place of peace and gratitude."

Learn more about Esther in this short video

Esther is a source of joy and inspiration to everyone she meets, including her long-time client Serena Williams. The tennis icon and Esther's dear friend shared a heartfelt video rallying support for Esther and her team.

Watch Serena's video

Esther has the amazing support of her family, friends and her medical team at UCLA. On October 31, 2021, we rally for Esther and all those facing pancreatic cancer to walk for research, race towards a cure and never give up!

Esther Lee to be Honorary Starter for the 24th Annual LA Cancer Challenge

The Hirshberg Foundation is thrilled to welcome Esther Lee, DPT, as our Honorary Starter for the 2021 LA Cancer Challenge Walk/Run! Esther exemplifies courage, hope and positivity in the face of her pancreatic cancer diagnosis. We first met Esther in January of 2021 when she joined our [Patient & Family Webinar](#) where we celebrated [10, 20 & 30 year pancreatic cancer survivors](#). Esther instantly made an impression on Zoom in her purple headband and within hours had ordered purple beanies and wristbands for her whole family; and from there she became part of the Hirshberg Family.

As a local cancer patient, we invited her to participate in our [Healing Bloom Zoom](#), a virtual flower arranging class for survivors. She and her sister created a beautiful floral arrangement. Esther shared that this floral class inspired her “new favorite hobby” of gardening in her back yard. Before we knew it she had registered [Team Esther](#) for the LA Cancer Challenge, 6 months in advance! She is all in with her support of the Foundation and we are some of her biggest cheerleaders – although she has many, a great community rallying around her.

She generously shared some details of what the last year has been like for her:

Prior to a year ago, I was zipping around my typical busy fast paced life. I was thoroughly enjoying my super busy life as a

doctor of physical therapy, providing manual treatments for my private clients in LA and around the world. When I wasn't working, I was playing beach volleyball 3-4 times per week, playing tennis, snowboarding, riding my bike, jogging, and working out. I lived a "healthy," active life and was passionate about traveling and exploring the wonderful cultures and beautiful landscapes around the world. When home in LA, I loved hosting game nights with friends and loved building deeper connections with loved ones.

July 29th, 2020, my world flipped upside down and took a sharp turn. I was diagnosed with stage IV [pancreatic neuroendocrine](#) tumor with metastasis to my liver, spine and lymph nodes. Fortunately, on August 26th, 2020, I was able to undergo surgical removal of my 14cm tumor, spleen and part of my pancreas because I was having difficulty eating and had developed severe pain in my spine. Due to complications with fluid build-up around my right lung, I had to undergo several procedures to drain and resolve the accumulation that was resulting in my lung collapsing and making it extremely difficult to breathe for almost 4 months. I had the fluid around my lung drained every morning for 3 months until I was finally able to have my pleural catheter removed December 10, 2020. I underwent 3 rounds of chemotherapy and then 4 rounds of peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT, which I am about to complete July 27th, 2021), "the bazooka treatment for neuroendocrine tumors" according to my wonderful oncologist. I will be getting my first scan post-PRRT treatment, in late October, just prior to the LA Cancer Challenge. This scan will assess how my cancer cells have responded to treatment.

It has been a long bumpy road but I am so very thankful that I have come an extremely long way in (almost) 1 year. My family, friends, medical team of doctors, nurses, techs, and my chaplain at UCLA, the wonderful Hirshberg Foundation community and of

course my adorable sidekick maltipoo pup, have been my greatest support, inspiration and gift along my journey. My sister and brother immediately stepped in from day 1 to be my personal 24/7 nurse, pharmacist, chef, driver, masseuse, tear wiper, dog walker, maid, secretary and entertainer to keep me smiling. My incredible community of loved ones have consistently blown my socks away with the love, prayers, encouragement, and thoughtful, generous gifts over the past year.

I am overflowing with gratitude that I am still here to appreciate each day, continue building each relationship in my life and create new wonderful memories. I am continuing to learn the incredible healing power of love, gratitude, and positive determination which come in all shapes and sizes. We all constantly cycle through different ups and downs of life, but we all have the powerful ability to help ourselves and others make our journeys enjoyable and fulfilling. I've truly learned to take it one day at a time, the greatest challenge being fully present in each day, moment by moment... this is the amazing place of peace and gratitude.

Esther exemplifies grace and expresses gratitude in every step of her treatment journey. She is a constant source of inspiration and joy, which is just a part of why she has been chosen to be our Honorary 5k Starter for 2021 [LA Cancer Challenge](#).

The 2021 LA Cancer Challenge

Honorary Medical Chair is Dr. Li of UCLA

On October 31st the LA Cancer Challenge is making a triumphant return to the UCLA campus once again! We are delighted to share that a dedicated supporter of the Foundation, [Dr. Zhaoping Li](#), Chief of the Division of Clinical Nutrition, has accepted our invitation to be LACC Honorary Medical Chair. It is fitting that we begin a new post-pandemic chapter with Dr. Li at the helm; her exceptional commitment to wellness and expertise in nutrition impacts pancreatic cancer survivors every day.

Zhaoping Li, MD, PhD was welcomed into our Foundation family in 2016 when she was awarded a [Seed Grant](#) for 'Nutrition Support to improve outcomes in patients with unresectable pancreatic cancer.' It was the first study of its kind to be funded by the Hirshberg Foundation. A couple years later she would also launch a medically supervised study investigating how dietary counseling, with and without nutrition supplementation, can affect outcomes of non-surgical patients. Dr. Li's research and position at UCLA continue to enrich our partnership and effectively serve patients in new ways.

In 2017, Dr. Li presented for the first time at the Hirshberg Foundation's Symposium for Pancreatic Cancer. Her unique insight made a memorable impression on patients. She was immediately a crowd favorite, sharing with patients [how to achieve optimal nutrition](#). Not long after, the Hirshberg Foundation hosted a hands-on [Cooking Healthy class](#), and Dr. Li answered the call once again. She patiently led survivors and caregivers through a fun cooking experience sharing nutritious recipes and cooking tips. Dr. Li continues to be instrumental in educating patients as they find themselves balancing the complexities of a changing

diet during and after treatment.

Whether she's discussing [nutrition and pancreatic cancer](#) at the 2019 Symposium or hosting our very first webinar during the pandemic, '[Eat & Live Well During the Corona Virus](#),' Dr. Li always has patients' best interests at heart. Nutrition can be a contentious topic for many patients navigating side effects, but Dr. Li's compassion, knowledge and warm personality make each event outshine the last. We are thrilled to welcome her as LACC Honorary Medical Chair and grateful to have her [walk and fundraise](#) on the [UCLA Health Sciences Team](#)!

More about Dr. Zhaoping Li

Zhaoping Li, MD, PhD is Professor of Medicine and Chief of the Division of Clinical Nutrition at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Li completed her MD and PhD in Physiology at Beijing University. Dr. Li has been a faculty member at UCLA and VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System since 1997. Dr. Li is board-certified in Internal Medicine and Physician Nutrition Specialist. Dr. Li has been a principal investigator for over 100 investigator-initiated NIH and industry-sponsored clinical trials; she has published over 200 peer-reviewed scientific papers and co-authored two books focusing on nutrition and nutrition-related to oncology.

Finding Your Voice to Inspire, Motivate and Never Give Up

My name is James, I live in Los Angeles and my affiliation with the Hirshberg Foundation goes back 10 years now. In 2010, my son

Christopher and a few friends participated in our first LA Cancer Challenge 5k Run.

Fighting the Good Fight for Glenn

Dedication stories from families or friends who have been touched by pancreatic cancer show the resilience and courage of the human spirit. Loved ones dedicate their time and effort every day to fighting for a cancer-free future in honor of someone touched by this disease. Every journey helps pave the way to a cure.

By Lucas Buck

I tell anyone that wants to listen that I am heavily involved in raising awareness for pancreatic cancer research, not for me, but for them. The reason being, it's not *if* the disease will affect them in some way but *when*. I've teamed up with The Hirshberg Foundation for when that time that comes and it effects your life. I believe the hard work of researchers and others gave me an extra year with my brother because of the Whipple procedure. That surgery gave me an extra year with my brother and I'm forever grateful for that. I will continue to fight the good fight with others, knowing it's not *if* but *when*, and because of our work there will be more answers.

On February 11, 2014, my brother Glenn and his wife Carrie gave birth to their first child, William Oliver "Ollie" Buck. While enjoying the life of being a new daddy, 3 weeks later my brother turned bright yellow and developed what is known as "painless

[jaundice](#)." Glenn was rushed to the James Cancer Institute at the Ohio State University. After spending the first 32 years of his life being known as the most athletic kid in any group of people, my brother was undergoing test after test to see what in the world was going on with him. Certainly it couldn't be pancreatic cancer, he was far too young.

My brother had never undergone any surgical procedures in his life, nor had he ever had any major illness. Glenn was the most athletic person I had ever met and I can barely remember him being sick growing up. On St. Patrick's Day of 2014, he was officially diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I can remember doing what everyone does, Googling "pancreatic cancer." I spent all but 30 seconds reading the survival rates and quickly clicked out of it. I had all the information I needed after one paragraph – the survival rates were terrible.

The next 6 months were spent in and out of "The James" at OSU, undergoing chemotherapy and radiation through a port that was installed on his left shoulder. Following this treatment, he underwent the Whipple procedure on August 19, 2014. After 9 hours of extremely invasive surgery, my brother came out and the surgery was deemed a "curative procedure." Unfortunately, as we know with pancreatic cancer, not all of the tumor cells were removed. Glenn spent the next 6 months going through chemo and radiation again at The James.

The hardest part was when he began to show signs of depression. Glenn rarely looked anyone in the eye and spent a lot of time in solitude. Finally, right around April, he turned a corner and we seemed to have our happy-go-lucky smiley guy back. Unfortunately, we went in for a check-up in late July, and what should have been a "good-to-go, take him off chemo" trip, turned into us learning the cancer had metastasized throughout his body and he now had possibly 2 weeks go live. Three weeks shy of his

34th birthday, my brother passed away, leaving behind a 1 year-old baby and his loving wife. He was 33.

Watching this disease take my brother away from his wife and son will stick with me forever. He had a laugh that would infectiously make anyone around him laugh. He's gone way too soon. The age 33 used to seem so old when we were kids. Now, looking at that age of death is about as sobering as any moment gets. Passing away before one's 34th birthday just seems impossible and I don't want any other family to have to experience that kind of loss.

The Whipple helped give us an extra year with Glenn, and I'm forever grateful, but we needed more. I will continue to fight the good fight knowing that because of our work there will be more answers. I am involved in raising awareness and money for research for all the families that will hear, "pancreatic cancer," so that they will have more time.

The 23rd Annual LA Cancer Challenge Honorary Starter is Purmine Oksayan

The Hirshberg Foundation is excited to welcome Purmine "Mine" Oksayan as [Honorary Starter for the 2020 LA Cancer Challenge Walk/Run](#)! Mine is an extraordinary woman whose light and smile bring warmth to those around her. In 2016, Mine was living a happy and productive life, spending time with family including her loving husband, children and grandchildren. In December of

that year, the shocking diagnosis of pancreatic cancer came. As the glue that holds everyone and everything together in her close-knit family, Mine was asked by her daughter just after diagnosis, "Mom, are you doing ok?" Mine rolled her eyes and replied, "this diagnosis is annoying, inconvenient and an interruption in my daily routine"...and both started laughing. A typical response from this woman who had no time for pancreatic cancer. Mine moved forward with confidence as she went through treatment at UCLA. She refers to Dr. Timothy Donahue and his medical team as her superheroes. She continues to live her life selfless and generous, sharing a positive attitude about the future. She truly lives each day to the fullest as a loving and guiding force within her family. If you have the pleasure of meeting her, you'll see that sparkle in her eye and her spirit shining through. It's is a privilege to introduce Mine as our virtual Honorary LACC Starter and we invite you to [register and join us](#) virtually this year too!

Read more about Purmine in a [heartfelt Mother's Day dedication by her daughter](#) Ani here.