# Healing Blooms, A New Partnership Grows with Viola Floral

The Hirshberg Foundation is honored to partner with Viola Flora for *Healing Bloom Zooms*, a no-cost flower arranging classes for cancer patients and survivors. The class aims to support patients on their healing journey, while raising awareness for pancreatic cancer.

The *Healing Bloom Zoom* was developed by Jelena Trifunovic, M.A., owner of Viola Floral, to help lower anxiety, reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall emotional wellness. Mayesh, the top national flower vendor, will be donating the florals and all classes will take place virtually via Zoom. Classes are taught by Trifunovic, a floral designer and seasoned K-12 science educator. Jelena brings her years of experience as an educator to provide informative classes that teach the fundamentals of floral design while providing a safe space for patients to relax, have fun and connect.

As a child growing up, Jelena was surrounded by the beauty of the natural world. In Serbia, later Southern California, holidays and family gatherings were spent in her family's kitchen arranging flowers with her mom, Luby, sharing stories, and laughing. When Luby was being treated for pancreatic cancer, Jelena remembers taking floral arranging classes and how much joy it brought them both. It is in Luby's memory that Jelena continues to give back and provide healing through floral therapy.

We are excited to partner with Jelena, Viola Flora, and Mayesh to bring our pancreatic cancer community these complimentary

flower arranging classes! Our aim is to provide resource and support for all, and we hope the *Healing Bloom Zooms* will help patients on their healing journey and support positive mental health, while we raise awareness of pancreatic cancer.

Learn more and sign up for a *Healing Bloom Zoom* »

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# February is National Cancer Prevention Month: Genetics

If you have a history of pancreatic cancer in your family, a basic understanding of genetic risk factors and resources may help you prevent a diagnosis or detect it early. We may not "have a say" when it comes to DNA but we are empowered to learn about pancreatic cancer, talk to family members about our health history and take steps to lessen risk. This knowledge, in combination with the resources the Hirshberg Foundation provides, can help address your concerns about Familial Pancreatic Cancer (FPC).

When two first-degree relatives (parent, child or sibling) have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, seeking genetic counseling is part of your path to education and prevention. Having a family history does not necessarily mean you will develop pancreatic cancer, but it can increase your risk. Familial or hereditary pancreatic cancer accounts for about 10% of pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Gene mutations can be passed down through generations, known as inherited mutations and can increase your risk for developing pancreatic and other cancers. For example, the BRCA1 &

BRCA2 gene mutations, in part, account for an increased risk of cancer among Ashkenazi Jews. Several genetic mutations are currently being researched for their connection to an increased risk of developing pancreatic and other cancers. These genes include: PRSS1 BRCA1, BRCA2, ATM, PALB2, MLH1, MSH2, EPCAM, MSH6, APC, STK11, and CDKN2A. Each of these genes have a different risk profile and different cancer risks depending on the individual gene. Genetic testing and counseling can lead to medical management to reduce the chance of developing cancer or increased surveillance for cancer, with the goal of detecting cancer earlier when treatment options and outcomes are better.

Learning your family history and knowing the risk factors can help you take proactive steps. You can find a genetic counselor in the US or Canada by contacting the National Society of Genetic Counselors. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) recommends genetic counselling for all individuals diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, however, genetic testing is not limited to patients. As you investigate your family history, it is also important to understand the basics about this disease. Take the time to discover what your pancreas is and which modifiable risk factors you can prevent. Understanding your genetic make-up will help you determine whether your DNA puts you at higher risk and how to tackle those challenges.

Learn more about genetic risk factors.

# Genetic Counseling

Wendy Conlon, MS, CGC, a genetic counselor with the UCLA Center for Pancreatic Diseases is a highly esteemed and trusted speaker for Hirshberg Foundation educational events. She oversees surveillance of patients and their family members, provides risk assessment, genetic counseling, and genetic testing for

individuals with pancreatic cancer and their at-risk relatives. She helps individuals and families navigate their treatment options, as well as other cancer prevention strategies. In 2020 she was featured in our ongoing Patient & Family Webinar Series providing important updates on genetic counseling and access to testing during COVID 19. In 2019, she also provided her expertise when she presented on *Why Should I See a Genetic Counselor*at the Hirshberg Foundation's annual Symposium on Pancreatic Cancer. We invite you to take advantage of these videos and other resources shared so you can learn about the benefits of genetic counseling.

Watch *Why Should I See a Genetic Counselor*

Watch Genetic Counseling: Review and Updates During COVID-19

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# February is National Cancer Prevention Month: Lifestyle

*Throughout National Cancer Prevention Month we'll share risk factors, scientific research, webinars on topics touching on prevention and facts about how you can make an impact.*

The choices we make *and* avoid when it comes to our personal health can have a ripple effect throughout the body. Research has shown that certain lifestyle choices, such as smoking, can damage cells and create a domino effect throughout our DNA. When cells become damaged, there is a risk of gene mutations that can cause cells to divide at unprecedented rates and grow exponentially. When cells grow rapidly, out of control or do not die off at the appropriate time, they cause tumors. In most

pancreatic cancer cases, risk factors such as smoking, obesity, stage-2 diabetes and chronic pancreatitis can cause these DNA mutations. The first steps on the path to prevention are to adopt a healthy lifestyle and lower your modifiable risk factors.

Our Path to Prevention worksheet outlines risk factors to avoid and steps you can take to get on track towards wellness. While the scientific community is investigating possible methods for prevention and early screening, it is up to us to stay vigilant about our health. If you smoke make a plan to quit, reduce your alcohol intake and remember that your food choices matter. Build a lifestyle around nutritious food, find ways to boost the immune system, take care to reduce stress and kick bad habits as these changes may even save your life. Speak with your doctor on the best course of action to reduce inflammation, prevent insulin-resistance and lower stress. The path to prevention starts with a healthy lifestyle that can help lower your risk for cancer.

Share our Path to Prevention worksheet with your community »

## Prevention Research

In 2020, a team of UCLA researchers were awarded an NIH grant for $5.75 million to study the roles diet, obesity and inflammation play in the development of pancreatic cancer. “We know that the biological mechanisms of obesity, such as inflammation, can lead to the development of pancreatic cancer,” said Dr. Guido Eibl, Laboratory Director of the Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory. This study will look at the mechanisms that drive the formation of pancreas tumors with the goal of prevention strategies for those at higher risk. Dr. Eibl included, "Several known and modifiable risk factors can increase the risk for pancreatic cancer,

including obesity, smoking, and alcohol. In addition, chronic pancreatitis and genetic factors can enhance the risk for pancreatic cancer. It is paramount to avoid or lower known risk factors, manage chronic pancreatitis, and get genetic counseling (if pancreatic cancer runs in the family) to reduce the risk of and prevent pancreatic cancer."

Read more about Dr. Eibl's research »

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# February is National Cancer Prevention Month!

*Throughout National Cancer Prevention Month we'll share risk factors, scientific research, webinars on topics touching on prevention and facts about how you can make an impact.*

The first step on the pancreatic cancer prevention path is making healthy lifestyle choices. It takes decisive action to commit to quit smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding diabetes and managing pancreatitis. Learning about these lifestyle changes, or modifiable risk factors, empowers us to make healthy choices that can help prevent cancer. Adopting healthy lifestyle choices is the first step towards decreasing risk.

While we can change some risk factors, others are beyond our control, like family history and genetics. Knowledge is power when it comes to these immutable risk factors. It is important to know your family history and determine if there are familial risk factors. Seeking out a qualified geneticist allows those at an increased risk for hereditary pancreatic cancer to make

proactive choices. While there is still no early screening test for pancreatic cancer, those with a genetic predisposition may qualify for screening programs. Across the US researchers have created pancreatic cancer tumor registries to track people with an increased genetic risk. Some of these registries include:

- The Pancreatic Tumor Registry at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC)
- The National Familial Pancreatic Tumor Registry (NFPTR) at Johns Hopkins University
- The Cancer of the Pancreas Screening-5 (CAPS5) Study which is also a clinical trial currently conducted at 8 universities

Researchers continue to investigate what puts us at risk organically, genetically, environmentally and socioeconomically so that we can better prevent and treat pancreatic cancer. While scientists continue to explore and uncover what leads to pancreatic cancer, the first step on the path to prevention is to stay vigilant with your healthy choices.

Learn more about risk factors »

# Prevention Research

The Hirshberg Foundation funds research to better understand the biology behind tumor development as well as to fully understand how environmental factors can accelerate tumor growth. This research contributes to pancreatic cancer prevention, early screening and treatment options.

The Sahin-Toth Laboratory, under the direction of leading pancreatic disease researcher, Dr. Sahin-Toth, is contributing to our understanding of this disease and one of the largest risk factors: chronic pancreatitis. In 2020, the Sahin-Toth lab

published 10 papers, including a new study that looks at lifestyle factors and acute pancreatitis to determine prevention strategies. Working closely with the Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory these two labs are working to better understand how diet, obesity, genetics & inflammation contribute to pancreatic cancer acceleration.

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# Breaking Up With Cancer

*By Wendy Hammers*

As part of our Patient & Family Webinars series, Wendy Hammers shared her 10 tenets that supported her throughout her treatment and continue to guide her as a 5-year pancreatic cancer survivor.

## 1. Adopting a Wellness Stance

Assume health. Decide you are getting better. You do not have to assume the worst. Assume the best. In the words of Dr. Christy Funk, "You are a survivor from the moment you get diagnosed, because you didn't die." Surround yourself with people, places and things that believe in your positive outcome. Create your wellness bubble and block CNN, the "constant negative news." There is nothing to be gained by thinking the worst. It is amazing how optimism can literally affect your outcome.

## 2. Fierce Listening

Listen! With your whole heart, to the still, small voice inside, to the gut feelings. Listen to your team. Listen to your

compassionate tribe. And listen to yourself, above all. If your doctor does not feel right, or makes you feel more sick, or doesn't support your wellness stance, there are others – make your healthcare team work for you. Listen to your body, if you think a purple crystal will help, try it!

## 3. Radical Self Compassion

Decide to love yourself. Love every single part of yourself. Extreme kindness helped save my life, it can work for you too. Be compassionate to yourself as you go through treatment and the different ways it will change your body & what you are able to do.

## 4. Learning to Receive

Let others help you heal. Now is not the time to go it alone, you do not need to be a hero. You need support, and people want to support you. Learn to receive help and you set up a boomerang health cycle. Accept help. Once you are well, you'll be able to pay it forward.

## 5. Stillness as a Spiritual Practice

"Don't just do something, sit there." – Sylvia Boorstein.
Cancer will slow you down, take that as a good thing.

## 6. Serious Sense of Humor

Loopy Loopenstein is my alter ego, the me on drugs from the hospital. I decided to find the joy and humor in things. People will do weird and unhelpful things, laugh it off, it is the only way.

## 7. Cultivating a Kick ass Community

Build your Recovery Tribe. Healing is a family affair. There are people who want to support you and help you, find them and surround yourself with them.

## 8. Taking a Day off from Cancer

Because everyone needs a day off, even cancer patients. Find something, a day, a concert, something where you can decide to exist as someone without cancer. This might also be deciding that you want to help others. Small acts of kindness for others go a long way in lifting spirits and feeling like you are contributing.

## 9. Woo Woo Woo

My deep dive into alternate healing modalities to supplement my traditional treatment. Supplements, feng shui, sound baths, writing workshops, crystals. I started thinking of it as a project I was doing, a project to get well. I tried all sorts of things that made sense to me, and then when people suggested ridiculous things, I listened deeply and decided if it felt right for me.

## 10. Life Beyond the Project

“Tell me – what is it that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” – Mary Oliver
I spent a lot of time thinking about what my life would look like on the other side of cancer. I spent so much time thinking about my really cool life, I didn’t have time to be scared.

## Additional Resources:

## Wellness Coach – Marisa Harris


## Bodyworker/healer – James Arena

## Tibetan Sound Bowls – Jahna and Michael

## Cancer Support Community Los Angeles

Want to speak directly to Wendy? Reach out here: wendyhammers.com

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# Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES) Seeks Volunteers

The “Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES),” conducted by Dr. Annette Stanton is seeking volunteers. Dr. Stanton is a 2016 Seed Grant Awardee and spoke at the 2018 Symposium on the importance of managing the emotional journey, for both pancreatic cancer patients and their caregivers. PACES continues Dr. Stanton’s esteemed career of

working to improve the psychological and physical health of patients & caregivers over the course of the cancer trajectory.

# Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES)

**Introduction:**

When diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, adults and their loved ones often do not know what to expect. It is important for both affected individuals and their medical teams to understand the likely physical, psychological, and social consequences of the experiences, as well as useful strategies for living with and beyond the disease and its treatment. By taking part in the current study, you can advance the understanding of the experience of pancreatic cancer, and pave the way for the development of approaches to promote quality of life and health for adults living with pancreatic cancer.

**Why is the study being conducted?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the physical and psychological well-being of individuals with pancreatic cancer and their caregivers (e.g., spouse).

**Who can participate?**

Individuals with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and their primary caregivers are invited to take part in this study.

**What is involved?**

Participants will complete one 90 minute in-person session at UCLA as well as three questionnaires over the course of four months. Questionnaires about topics such as physical and psychological experiences, coping with pancreatic cancer, and

your relationship with your caregiver or individual with pancreatic cancer. Participation is completely voluntary and participants will be compensated $40 each for their time.

**How can I contact the study team to learn about the study and take part?**

Email our study at paces.ucla@gmail.com. The Principal Investigator for the study is Dr. Annette Stanton at UCLA.

This study is closed for recruitment.