

# Celebrate and Learn from 10, 20 and 30-year Survivors of Pancreatic Cancer

We are honored to present a celebration and conversation with three long-term survivors of pancreatic cancer, Philip, Michelle and Donna. Our guests discuss how they have dealt with the highs and lows of their cancer journey. Moderated by [Dr. Elizabeth Cleary](#) of the [Simms/Mann-UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology](#), our panelists share insights into how they weather the bumps in the road as well as how they achieve and appreciate the wins. The panel also addressed audience submitted questions for an informative discussion filled with hope.



Elizabeth Cleary, PhD returns to our Patient and Family Webinar Series to celebrate and speak with three long-term pancreatic cancer survivors. In April 2020, Dr. Cleary presented on [Coping Skills for the Pancreatic Cancer Community: Tools and Tips](#)

[During Covid-19](#). We are happy to welcome her back to moderate our conversation with a 10, 20 and 30-year survivor. In this inspiring discussion they share how they navigate their health challenges to become long-term survivors of pancreatic cancer.



**Philip** is a 30-year survivor who in 1990 was diagnosed with pancreatic neuroendocrine cancer (NET). There was no internet to research and little information available to him to understand what this diagnosis meant. He was a marathon runner and initially thought his pain was 'runners stitch' however, soon after he was told he had pancreatitis. After non-stop pain he entered a hospital in Los Angeles and after 4 weeks without improving he was told by a surgeon, "we need to open you up to see what's going on." Philip was in surgery for 19 hours and awoke to a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. After months in the hospital he was finally released. Eventually he healed and has lived a fairly normal life for the last 30 years. He credits his faith, will to live and the incredible support from his wife and family for his good health.



**Michelle** is a 20-year survivor of pancreatic adenocarcinoma (PDAC), the most common pancreatic cancer. In 2002 she was diagnosed just one month before her 51st birthday. Other than a cousin who passed from pancreatic cancer in 1994 she had no other family history with this disease. She was tired for years and asked her doctor continually to test her thyroid to see if that was the culprit. Once diagnosed, she went to UCLA and [Dr. Howard Reber](#), a renowned pancreatic cancer surgeon, to see if she was a surgical candidate. She was told she was inoperable and began chemotherapy. Her chemotherapy (5FU/Celebrex/Gemzar) was able to shrink her tumor from the size of an orange to the size of a grape in just six weeks! More chemo and radiation followed a successful surgery with Dr. Reber. Chemo continued for two more years and eventually she felt confident stopping treatment and starting life again. In 2014 she shared during our [Annual Symposium](#) that she felt “very healthy and had a good quality of life.” It’s time to check in with Michelle to see how she is doing six years later as she celebrates 20 years.



**Donna** is a 10-year survivor of pancreatic cancer (PDAC). Being in the best shape of her life, Donna found herself with a pancreatic cancer diagnosis in 2011. She had the Whipple surgery performed by [Dr. Joe Hines](#) with [Dr. Zev Wainberg](#) as her oncologist, both of UCLA. The first 5 years post treatment were great! Then she went on a clinical trial which worked well for 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  years. Today she is on a new clinical trial (targeted therapy) and is doing well. Even with the bumpy road Donna appreciates where she is today and has made life changes along the way to live every day to the fullest.

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# Our Gift to You on Giving Tuesday: Yoga and Meditation with Alicia

Yoga and meditation are ancient practices used across the globe to calm the mind and hone the senses. Participation in a yoga program has been shown to help cancer survivors feel better physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Clinical trials have shown that yoga can improve mental health outcomes of stress, mood and anxiety. There are findings that show relief from fatigue, gastrointestinal issues, pain severity as well as improvements in respiratory function and heart rate with yoga. There are many different forms of yoga and this noninvasive practice can be endlessly adapted so that all may benefit, regardless of functional or physical challenges.

Meditation, the practice of training attention and awareness to clear the mind and calm the emotions, is another natural boost for wellness. Mindfulness meditation practice for cancer patients can alleviate insomnia and, like yoga, provide a more elevated mind-body connection. Different forms of meditation use various techniques to focus the mind, such as focusing on the breath or a mantra. Breathing exercises, for example, can help patients feel calm before a procedure or doctor appointment or soothe anxiety prior to a painful procedure.

Both practices provide tools to help move forward in life, and treatment, with a more relaxed, mindful and resilient attitude, as well as the ability to self-soothe and return to calmness. Selecting an appropriate style of yoga with an experienced, certified instructor is recommended, which is why we turned to [Alicia "ACE" Easter](#) for this special Giving Tuesday webinar.

Alicia “ACE” Easter is a longtime friend and supporter of the Hirshberg Foundation. A [Hirshberg Training Team alumni](#), an LA Cancer Challenge team captain, a Yoga & Meditation teacher, and a Master Reiki Healer, Alicia not only embodies but inspires others to “Never Give Up.” Alicia lost her mom to pancreatic cancer on April 20, 2002. Devastated by the loss, she knew she was searching for something. At a yoga class where the teacher asked about her broken heart, she knew she was ready to begin her healing journey and honor her mother through her practice.

Alicia, also a Master Reiki practitioner, now teaches yoga and meditation classes, locally and online, and recognizes it’s an honor to guide students on their journey through yoga, meditation, and grief with love. We’ve partnered with her on Giving Tuesday to share her gifts of empowerment and mindfulness with our pancreatic cancer community. Alicia will lead us in a *Soul Liberation Heart-Flow* yoga session followed by *I Am Love* meditation.

Soul Liberation is **unconditional** love of one’s self. In loving yourself, you pay homage to our ancestors, teachers, and the lineage of yoga. Yoga is a reminder to be kind, love, and forgive quickly and often. This yoga sequence was created to help liberate the mind, body and soul. Designed to balance the Anahata (heart) chakra and strengthen the spine, this is a great class for those experiencing grief, in need of a little love, or looking to find greater balance. Alicia will provide modifications for those without yoga mats and those who wish to stay seated. We will end our movement with an I AM LOVE meditation. Please have a journal, pen, and open heart ready. We hope this session will leave you with a deep, heart-expanded meditation which will energize and balance your state of being.

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## Conversation and Coaching with Pancreatic Cancer Survivors Marisa Harris & Wendy Hammers

Surviving and Thriving – that’s what Marisa Harris and Wendy Hammers are doing. Marisa is a 21-year stage 4 pancreatic cancer survivor and Wendy is celebrating over 5 years since her diagnosis. We welcome both women back to our Patient & Family Webinar series to expand on their earlier presentation, [\*Breaking Up with Pancreatic Cancer: Survivor Stories\*](#). As they touched on, Marisa helped coach Wendy through her diagnosis. To provide our community with a deeper understanding of what cancer coaching is and whether it might be the right fit, we are thrilled to have Wendy & Marisa present a coaching session.

When Marisa was told she had just months to live, she decided to transform her life. As a Master Integrative Coach, Marisa supports patients in achieving their personal goals related to optimal health and wellness. After Wendy was diagnosed, she heard about Marisa and enlisted her as a coach where together they created personalized, integrated healing program. Wendy considers Marisa an important ingredient in her journey back to health.

In this webinar, Marisa and Wendy will take us through a coaching session, including tips, tools, practices and a

question and answer session open to all participants. As longterm survivors, both Marisa & Wendy have a great deal of wisdom and hope to share it with our pancreatic cancer community.

Watch Wendy & Marisa's presentation [Breaking Up with Pancreatic Cancer: Survivor Stories »](#)

Read [Wendy's 10 tenets on Breaking up with Cancer »](#)

Connect [with Marisa & learn more about cancer coaching »](#)

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# Two Perspectives, One Journey: Caregiving for the Pancreatic Cancer Patient

For those who have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer or have a loved one who has, you know all too well that it's not just the patient whose life is immediately affected upon diagnosis. Although family members and close friends do their best to jump into high gear to help, the person who is thrust into the position of primary caregiver carries the bulk of the weight on their shoulders.

Caregiving can be filled with rewards and joy but it can also be overwhelming and exhausting. The caregiver is most often the



spouse, child or a close friend that takes on the role of organizer, note taker, nurse, researcher, news central, housekeeper, cook, driver, cheerleader and so much more. Initially the pancreatic cancer patient has no idea what their needs will be and the caregiver is clueless as to what will be expected of them. Too often the role of caregiving lands on someone who feels ill-equipped to fill all of these necessary shoes. In some cases, the patient lives alone and there is no obvious caregiver to speak of.

Pancreatic cancer support groups in-person or online provide important supportive services but there are still basic needs that have to be met in the home and often, round the clock. This webinar will help guide the patient and caregiver to better understand and prepare for what lies ahead.

Dr. Annette Stanton joins us to present important information about how each person may be affected during this stressful time. [Dr. Stanton's](#) research centers on identifying factors that help and hinder individuals as they adjust to health-related adversity. Her research tests theories of stress, coping and how individuals and couples confront cancer and other chronically stressful experiences. Her career has focused on answering questions such as, "when adults face profound and prolonged stressors, what factors enhance or impede their well-being and health?" and "how can research that specifies those factors be translated into approaches to enhance psychological and physical health outcomes during chronically stressful experiences?"

[Annette L. Stanton](#), PhD, is Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry/Biobehavioral Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles, a member of the Center for Cancer Prevention and Control Research in the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, and senior research scientist at the UCLA Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology. She is incoming Chair of the

Department of Psychology and currently chairs the PhD program in health psychology. Through research, Dr. Stanton identifies factors that promote or impede psychological and physical health in adults and couples undergoing chronically stressful experiences, with a focus on the experience of cancers of the pancreas, breast, eye, and lung. She then translates her findings into action by developing and testing approaches to enhance psychological and physical health over the course of the cancer trajectory.

[Learn more about Dr. Stanton's PACES study and apply to be involved »](#)

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A very special thanks to our Sponsors & Supporters for helping ensure that these vital patient resources can be offered free-of-charge in place of our Annual Symposium.

The logo for Novocure, featuring the word "novocure" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "o" is stylized with a dark blue circular element. A small "TM" trademark symbol is positioned to the upper right of the word.



**California Community Foundation, Caroline  
Dockrell, Fineberg Foundation, Dr. Robert**

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## **Cannabis and Oncology: What do we know?**

Cannabis has been used as medicine for thousands of years across the globe. It was only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that regulations were put in place to classify it as an illegal substance in the United States. Cannabis was officially outlawed at the federal level in the US in 1970. With the passage of California's Proposition 215 in 1996, cannabis for medical use has become increasingly popular. In 2012, states in the US began to legalize cannabis for recreational use. Today, there is more and more research being done to fully understand the medical and health benefits of cannabis.

For the cancer patient, [cannabis](#) has a number of potential benefits, especially in the management of symptoms. Many scientists and doctors tout the benefits of cannabis in managing the side effects of chemo and radiation therapies such as nausea, vomiting, pain, insomnia, and depression. The patients we are in contact with, often share how cannabis has helped them with various symptoms during and after treatment.

In a [study presented](#) at the 2019 annual meeting of the [American Society for Clinical Oncology](#) (ASCO), it was revealed that an overwhelming majority of oncologists strongly support and

recommend the use of medical marijuana for cancer patients. The problem is that almost half of them feel they are not qualified to prescribe it as part of the treatment.

Dr. Noah Federman, who was first connected with the Hirshberg Foundation via the [3rd Annual UCLA Cannabis Research Symposium](#) in 2019, specializes in cannabis and oncology. His clinical oncology practice uses cannabis and cannabinoid compounds as adjunctive therapies and has a keen interest in how they can help patients. After hearing his academic lecture on “Cannabis Use in Oncology” it was clear our pancreatic cancer community would benefit and appreciate hearing him present the latest information. Dr. Federman will share the science behind the anecdotal stories in this ever-emerging field.

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The NIH (National Institute of Health) has created a map showing the U.S. states and territories that have approved the medical use of cannabis. Last updated: 03/23/2020



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## **Breaking up with Pancreatic Cancer: Survivor Stories**

While scientists are continuously working to better understand and treat pancreatic cancer, more energy is also going towards integrating a holistic approach that emphasizes active patient engagement with their well-being. Progress in the lab and



through clinical trials is being made, but many patients and caregivers are still concerned with the mental attitude needed to tackle a cancer diagnosis.

We know that emotional health impacts over all well-being, so in our latest webinar, we turn to two long-term survivors who will share their tips for a wellness approach to pancreatic cancer. Wendy Hammers and Marisa Harris will explain how they learned to create the healthiest environment for themselves in order to have the best possible outcome pre-, during and post-treatment. They will discuss the importance of setting your own healthy path, tips and tools for moving forward and how taking charge can truly make a difference in the health and well-being of patients as well as their loved ones.

Wendy and Marisa met at a crucial point in Wendy's pancreatic cancer treatment. Wendy will share how their journeys intersected and the importance of her relationship with "Coach Marisa." Marisa is a 21-year, stage-4 pancreatic cancer survivor who also faced many choices the moment she was diagnosed. Her remarkable journey is an inspiration to anyone with a life-threatening health diagnosis. Marisa and Wendy will share more than just their stories, they offer the tools & tips they have both honed to lead healthy, happy lives where "cancer" is no longer center stage.

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[Wendy Hammers](#) is an actress, speaker, dancer, published author, storyteller, producer, stand-up comic, foodie and creative community builder. She is also a 5-year pancreatic cancer survivor who took control early in her cancer journey to seek out healthy ways to live and to shine a positive light on this challenging time in her life. Wendy knew there had to be another component to battling cancer besides eating healthy and exercising.

[Marisa Harris](#), a life coach and long-term cancer survivor who Wendy connected with early in her treatment. In 1998, Marisa was working at a Fortune 500 company when she was diagnosed with stage-4 pancreatic cancer and given 9 months to live. Refusing to accept this death sentence, she developed and implemented an integrative multidisciplinary healing program. She learned that healing takes place on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual level. To this day, Marisa is healthy and cancer-free. Marisa wholeheartedly believes in the transformational power of Integrative Coaching and now devotes her life to this work. She has coached hundreds of people who are in pain, in transition, or in an emotional malaise to a place of healing, passion, and joy.

[Read Wendy's 10 tenets on Breaking up with Cancer »](#)

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