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Nine years later Bill returned to UVA to discuss complications he was experiencing when he received a diagnosis that required immediate medical intervention—he had colon cancer.

“Even though I live in Richmond, it never crossed my mind to go anywhere but UVA for my treatment,” Bill says. “The doctors are the best.”

Now he travels to UVA Cancer Center Pantops, where Bill has been inspired by the relationship he has formed with Dr. Matthew Reilley.

“He has the right manner, the right knowledge, and he talks about moving forward,” Bill says. “I don’t think I would have lived these last nine months if Dr. Reilley hadn’t really worked hard to find the right therapies to stave off this cancer for me.”

Dr. Reilley, who specializes in making immunotherapies more effective in the treatment of gastrointestinal cancers, said he was drawn to the field of oncology because of the relationships and trust that develop with patients. “From the patient perspective, the community oncology centers can be more accessible and convenient,” Dr. Reilley says. “From a doctor’s perspective, this model of delivery helps in the pursuit of medicine because certain patients benefit from being in certain locations.”

Dr. Reilley, too, feels grateful to practice medicine in an environment that fosters both personal connections and innovative research. “My primary interest in doing research is to make things work for patients, and to translate the most promising therapies into treatments that help patients and make a difference in their lives,” Dr. Reilley says.

Neither Bill nor Dr. Reilley know how this treatment will ultimately play out, but they do know that they are in it together.

“There is a long-term relationship here, and a lot of trust,” Bill says. “He trusts that I’m doing everything I can on my end, and I trust that he is doing everything on his end.”

“I can’t let Dr. Reilley down because he’s done all this research for me, he’s developed new protocols, and the nurses and researchers and staff are all really wonderful people,” Bill says. “It’s a great big picture, and I like to think that I’m part of the team.”

For years Bill Gregory’s job was to ensure that hospitals operated effectively. The emergency room, the parking garage, the cancer unit, the cafeteria—each day he thought of his hospitals as holistic systems with a patient at the center.

Now years after his retirement from a career in hospital administration, roles have reversed. Today, a comprehensive team of doctors, nurses, and researchers at the new UVA Cancer Center Pantops are working hard to ensure that Bill receives the best possible treatment for his recent colon cancer diagnosis. “They’re a second family for me now, and I look forward to seeing them every two weeks,” Bill says. “I go home feeling good, which doesn’t happen in a high percentage of healthcare facilities—I know from experience.”

The last nine months of Bill’s care mark the second major contribution that UVA has made to his quality of life. A native of Richmond, VA, Bill first sought care at UVA in 2008 to address chest pain and breathing difficulty.

What he learned next would change the course of his life forever—Bill needed a lung transplant. It was a long road to recovery, and Bill was a model patient determined to regain his independence. He became a fixture in Charlottesville, participating in the transplant support group, and visiting medical students to teach them about lung disease and life after receiving a transplant.

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EYING THE FUTURE OF CANCER RESEARCH

What will innovative cancer research look like, or even 30 years from now? What will immunotherapy or smart chemotherapy look like in the coming decades, and how will cancer research benefit society as a whole? To these questions, Darla Davies, UVA’s director of philanthropy and public affairs, offers a confident answer. “With the generous donations of philanthropic individuals and organizations we can do the work that has to be done.”

Darla said a desire to move medicine forward, paired with personal experience, motivated her to make the gift. “A thriving research community drives innovation and creativity, and by seedling the most promising new ideas I hope this fund contributes to saving lives,” Darla says. A cancer survivor herself, she has also watched family members battle the disease. These experiences affected Darla deeply, but unknown to her then, they were experiences that helped prepare her to overcome a significant health issue of her own.

A REASON TO ROW

This September, 14 teams of four rowed 567,451 miles and raised almost $12,000 for UVA Cancer Center.

Four years ago, when Sally Bondurant’s son Eric was diagnosed with testicular cancer, she didn’t know how she would make it through. It started in February 2017, when Sally Bondurant and her husband Svend Pederson learned that their 27-year-old son, Eric, had testicular cancer. Eric immediately had surgery to remove his testicle. Unfortunately, in the fall of 2017, the cancer was still present even after a round of outpatient chemotherapy. His doctor made the decision to refer him to Dr. Robert Dreicer at UVA Cancer Center. In February 2018, Eric began inpatient chemotherapy treatments at UVA.

“Fighting cancer is a journey for the individual and the family,” Sally says. “As a parent, there is a quiet desperation and feeling of powerlessness.”

Eight months and four rounds of chemotherapy later, Eric recently received a very positive prognosis from Dr. Dreicer. In gratitude for the care Eric received at UVA, Sally and Svend wanted to give back while at the same time honoring their son’s courage and strength.

“Eric was doing his part fighting the disease, doctors and medical staff at UVA were doing their part by treating and healing, and we wanted to do our part too,” Sally explains.

A REASON TO ROW

Why did you decide to become a hematologist/oncologist?

I took an indirect path to clinical medicine. I started my career as a management consultant in the life science industry. In that role, I often interacted with many physician-thought leaders. Through these relationships, I could see and was motivated to have a more direct impact on human healthcare. So, I changed career paths and decided to become a physician.

I specialized in hematology/oncology for three important reasons. First, I was drawn to practice where there was significant unmet clinical need, and where I could hope to “move the needle” through my own research and clinical efforts. Second, heme/onc was poised to be a priority area with the potential to make great advances for patients. Third, I am the type of person who “wants to work” rather than “has to work.” I have a deep respect and love for individual patient care and pushing the research envelope. It inspires me every day.

What is the best part of your work at UVA?

Each patient is our most important patient. It is the highest honor and pleasure to be a part of my patients’ lives. The singular objective that we all share at UVA is to provide healthcare at a world-class level, and thus provide every patient with the best possible clinical outcomes. Further, I am blessed to work with incredibly gifted and dedicated colleagues. We have a very strong team ethos of seamless collaboration. Our patients and the critically needed research for future patients come first.

How has or does philanthropy impact your work?

We can only improve patient care with research. Every day, we are engaged in basic science efforts, studies or unique trials we design and lead through UVA Research. Unfortunately, it is expensive. But if we are dedicated to the future of human healthcare, we must be dedicated to addressing the financial realities of paying for this research.

We receive some grant funding from the NIH, independent research foundations, and the biopharmaceutical industry. But it is not enough to do the work we need to do for tomorrow’s medical successes. Only through the generous donations of philanthropic individuals and organizations can we do the work that has to be done.

One thing most people don’t know about you?

I am a simple person. I love my family. I especially love watching my son play tournament golf. But if the truth be told, I adore a well-poured martini.

Q&A with DR. LAHNN FOSTER