Taking a Stand-Fighting BACK Against Gynecologic Cancers Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to Gynecologic Cancers and the Lewin Fund

So we've done a lot of work with endometrial cancer, for example, advanced endometrial cancer, different hormonal mechanisms, looking at something called the newest hottest area of research is something called antibody drug conjugates, not only in gynecologic cancers, but also all types of cancers now.

And so we're looking at a program with a lot of different solid tumors and how this antibody drug conjugate, for example, works in a lot of different solid tumors.

So antibody drug conjugate, that's the hot new buzzword in cancer, ADC. We abbreviate it ADC. It's called antibody drug conjugate. We see it a lot in breast cancer, in lung cancer, now the gynecologic cancers, but it's basically an antibody way to deliver different drugs to a specific target receptor on a cell, which is kind of a way to describe it.

And there's so much research being done in this area. Hey everyone, this is Jonathan Marks from GoToHealth. How are you today? We're talking about a very important topic, and that's women's cancers.

There are many different types of women's cancers, and unfortunately, some of them are underfunded and we are undereducated. I'm talking about gynecologic cancers.

With us to talk about this today is Dr. Sharon Lewin. She's a board-certified gynecologic oncologist. She specializes in the diagnosis, treatment, and management of ovarian, endometrial, uterine, cervical, vulvar, and vaginal cancers.

She serves as the medical director of the New Jersey-based Holy Name Medical Center's Gynecologic Oncology Division. She's also the founder of the Lewin Fund to Fight Women's Cancers, and that's what we'll be talking about today.

The fund is committed to improving the quality of life for women facing cancer, advancing preventative strategies, and funding innovative research. Founded in 2014, they partner with leading researchers, healthcare institutions, and advocacy organizations to expand access to care and empower patients.

You'll hear more about the legacy of a courageous woman who was treated by Dr. Lewin, who helped fund the Lewin Cancer Fund. You can learn more and support the fund's activities at thelewenfund.org.

It's the word the and then lewen, and that's spelled L-E-W-I-N, thelewenfund.org. A reminder and a request.

How the Lewin Fund Supports Patients and Families

If you're enjoying the show, it would mean the world to us if you took a second to leave a five star review on YouTube, Apple podcasts or Spotify or wherever you're listening to us.

It helps more people find the show and lets us know we're on the right track. I thank you in advance. So welcome to the show, Dr. Sharon Lewin. How are you today?

I'm very well, Jonathan. Thank you so much for having me today. Good. So tell us about the Lewin Fund to Fight Women's Cancers and what inspired its founding.

Thank you for having me. So the Lewin Fund to Fight Women's Cancers is a wonderful organization that is really aimed to help women and their families with cancer.

So our nonprofits initially started from a grateful patient who had uterine or endometrial cancer. And when she passed away, she left a bequest in her will to continue some of the work that I'm doing with gynecologic cancer.

So I'm a gynecologic oncologist. I predominantly take care of women with gynecologic cancers. Although we also do work with women who don't have cancer or pre cancers, and she really wanted to continue the work that I was doing on a much larger level.

So that's really how our nonprofit started really unbeknownst to me from a really generous woman who was very philanthropic and saw her journey through uterine or endometrial cancer and really wanted to help other women on a larger scale.

God bless her and thank you for doing what you're doing. How does the Lewin Fund support women currently undergoing treatment for gynecologic cancers?

So our mission is sort of threefold. First of all, we support a lot of programs for women and their families directly impacted with cancer. So some examples of that are transportation funds that help women get to their chemotherapy and their doctor visits.

We also help, for example, psychosocial programs. Women who are diagnosed with cancer definitely need a lot of counseling and a lot of support. We also support some woman-to-woman programs, which are peer mentoring programs for women who are newly diagnosed with cancer.

So these are very tangible programs that help women and their families directly we also support for example some food pantry and support programs so that's sort of like one prong of direct assistance to women and their families who have been diagnosed with cancer what we've really seen since the pandemic so many organizations have really withdraw their funds to help women with transportation with food and pantry with counseling with house cleaning services with fertility preservation grants so a big part of our efforts are to really help these women and their families with these particular needs.

That's really one aspect of what we do. We also fund a lot of research, so that's a second prong, if you will, second part of our mission to really fund innovative research.

We have a great partnership with Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, for example, in Boston. They're really doing a lot of innovative research when it comes to women's cancers.

And then the third part of our mission is really education and advocacy to really just spread the word about what cancers are, especially gynecologic cancers, prevention, signs and symptoms, really the importance of early detection, because it really makes a big difference when we educate women to improve their outcomes.

So I think you've just answered the question, but let me ask so we can get really specific. What sets the Lewin Fund apart from other cancer-focused nonprofits?

That's a great question. So what sets the Lewin Fund apart from other nonprofits? Our board of directors, all of us are entirely a voluntary service. So none of us take a salary.

And I think that's really unique in the nonprofit world. So really, all the funds that we raise really go directly towards our mission. And so it's really just a passion project for us.

You know, as I mentioned, I'm a GYN oncologist. I take care of patients. And this is really a passion project for me to really help women on a larger scale throughout our communities.

So I think that definitely makes us unique that no one on the board takes a salary. So that really definitely makes us stand out. Also, we do support largely gynecologic cancers, which are definitely underrepresented and under recognized.

Research, ADCs, and Clinical Innovation

We do support all women with cancer, but have a large portion of gynecologic cancers represented. There have

been some studies by Northwestern and others that say in the philanthropic world, cancers like breast cancers and leukemias and lymphomas and pediatric cancers are actually overfunded compared to the number of patients that are actually affected with those cancers, and all the other cancers are really underfunded and underrepresented.

So we feel particularly special about really highlighting gynecologic cancers. And also I just think the nature with which we are doing the funding in terms of really highlighting these grassroots efforts with transportation, food and pantry, psychosocial programs, the things that really meet a critical need for a lot of underserved women on a day-to-day basis.

Great. And if people want to support you and learn more, I want to give the website now, and then we'll continue with the interview. People can go to the Lewin fund.org it's the Lewin fund.org and Lewin is spelled L E W I N the Lewin fund.org.

So Sharon, can you share a story or example of how the Lewin fund has made a tangible difference in someone's life? The testimonials are very impactful and one of the things that we love actually about our annual walk for women's cancers are it's a great opportunity to see not only patients and survivors and families, but also a lot of the women that have received benefit.

from our programs and just to hear their stories, it's definitely very heartwarming. All the programs that we support, the social workers in these programs, the patients send us testimonials, but we hear regularly, particularly from underserved women, how meaningful the transportation grants have been.

Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to even get to their chemotherapy appointments. How impactful the house cleaning grants have been to clean their homes when they're sick and not feeling well.

how important the fertility grants are for young women who have had issues with fertility after their chemotherapy treatments, but still want to have options to grow a family.

And so there have just been so many heartwarming stories. It's hard to pin it to one. But these are the things that just inspire you to keep going. You know, also when we see our work presented from Dana-Farber, for example, on a national scale at ASCO and some of these very large cancer meetings, you feel very proud to help support this work, which could not go forward without philanthropic support from organizations like ours.

So we see that we're making a difference on a larger and a smaller scale as well, too, which is extremely meaningful. You just mentioned something that's interesting and impressive to me that I guess young women can get gynecologic cancers and then have problems with fertility.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that? Because it's not just older women who are getting these problems. It can be younger women as well, correct?

Correct, that's exactly true. I mean, thankfully, most of the gynecologic cancers affect older women, but we do see younger women who are affected as well too, whether it's uterine cancer or ovarian or cervical cancer.

And there are data-driven choices to help preserve fertility for these women, but often there may be financial barriers to help them with egg freezing, for example, or embryo freezing.

And so we're able to help mitigate the cost of those type of options for certain women. So it's very helpful so that they can not have to worry and have the anxiety of, I can't afford those options that are available, but I know I have those options if I can only afford them and let them try to relax and focus on the importance of their cancer care.

Wonderful. It sounds like you're doing such wonderful work. What are some of the innovative research or clinical programs the Lewin Fund is currently funding?

Great questions. So we tend to partner, for example, with institutions like Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. A lot of these clinical trials that are ongoing, that are funded by pharmaceutical industries and things like NIH and other

large grant organizations, because funding these clinical trials requires a lot of money.

the investigators who are running these trials really kind of want to understand the science behind it. So why things work. And that's where our organization comes in, because the big organizations like pharmaceutical companies and different governmental agencies may not necessarily fund that component.

So we often fund what's called the translational component, which helps understand the science behind why things work. So we've done a lot of work with endometrial cancer, for example, advanced endometrial cancer, different hormonal mechanisms, looking at something called the newest hottest area of research is something called antibody drug conjugates, not only in gynecologic cancers, but also all types of cancers now.

Annual Walk for Women's Cancers

And so we're looking at a program with a lot of different solid tumors and how this antibody drug conjugate, for example, works in a lot of different solid tumors.

So we just help kind of fill the gaps. that are left by these other big pharmaceutical companies and governmental agencies. That's a new term for me. Antibiotic conjugate.

What is that again? And can you explain it? What it is a little bit? So antibody drug conjugate, that's the hot new buzzword in cancer, ADC. We abbreviate it ADC.

It's called antibody drug conjugate. We see it a lot in breast cancer and lung cancer, now the gynecologic cancers, but it's basically an antibody way to deliver different drugs to a specific target receptor on a cell.

which is kind of a way to describe it. And there's so much research being done in this area. And so there, you know, different targets and different, what are called payloads and a lot of precise science that are utilized, but it's a very exciting area of research.

We've seen tremendous results already in the clinical trials and lung cancer and breast cancer. For example, we have these ongoing trials now in GYN oncology.

And so it's very exciting. We're seeing a lot of promising results. Great. Now you mentioned fundraising before you have the Lewin funds annual walk for women cancers coming up.

And when is it, where is it? And what does this event mean to you personally and to the organization as a whole? So this is an incredible event in Bergen County.

We do have, of course, an in-person event, but also a virtual event. So this event first started during the pandemic. It was our first walk was virtual during COVID and has actually grown every year since then.

So we do have a virtual option. Last year we actually had participants from Canada and from various parts of Europe participate. So if anyone wants to participate globally or across the country, we would love it.

You don't have to be in Bergen County, but we would love for you to come to Bergen County if you do want to come. It's a really caring, joyful, and compassionate event to see not only survivors, but also people have been affected by cancer and just people who want to come together and support women with cancer.

It'll be our sixth annual Walk for Women's Cancers on October 5th. It's at Community College. We have a lot of wonderful volunteers who help put this together.

Students, so we use a lot of student volunteers. So anyone who's been interested in women's health, Also, medicine, the college has been excellent and Bergen Technical Schools for helping us with student volunteers.

So it's been a tremendous opportunity for the youngsters to also learn about the importance of nonprofits and

volunteering and giving back to the community.

Great. I just have to mention, Sharon mentioned Bergen County, that's in Northern New Jersey. And one of the things that Sharon and I share is I come from Bergen County, Teaneck, New Jersey, as a matter of fact.

And as a matter of fact, that's where Sharon works at Holy Name Hospital. So we have that in common. How can people participate? You mentioned it briefly, but how can people participate virtually in this walk or how can they contribute?

So through Run Sign Up, you can actually sign up. There is a virtual option or an in-person option. You can also be able to see in our website as well information about the walk with the flyer.

If you're able to come in person, that would be excellent. But there is a virtual option as well. You can host a team in your own neighborhood and walk.

How neat. So it's definitely a lot of fun and inspiring event. Great. So again, people can learn more and participate at TheLewinFund.org. It's T-H-E-The, Lewin, L-E-W-I-N, and then fund.org.

So what's the most important thing, Sharon, that a woman can do now for her health? I think it's very important to understand the signs and symptoms of cancer, to be sure that you're current on all your health screening exams, and also really to recognize the importance of cancer prevention, which if we have a few minutes, I would really love to talk about that, Jonathan, because I see with my own patients when I try to educate them, they're really not aware of these things.

Yes, let's do that. So we know that about one in three women and one in two men in the United States will unfortunately be affected by cancer in his or her lifetime.

But we also know that half of those cancers could actually be prevented by lifestyle issues. And I think we don't talk enough about what those lifestyle issues are in that data.

And it's really important to be proactive. So half of all cancers could be prevented. I mean, it's staggering statistics. If people would not smoke, really limit alcohol consumption, stay in an ideal body weight.

Cancer Prevention, Screening, and Lifestyle

So that is very important. We know now that obesity is linked to about 13 different kinds of cancers. So weight is a major issue that we definitely need to be talking to everyone about.

It's important to exercise, so to have at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week, and then to really have kind of a healthy diet so you stay in an ideal body weight.

But when you talk about these preventative things, half of all cancers could be prevented. And so I think people don't always understand the importance of taking care of yourself, especially the weight and the exercise component, which is very important.

Can you explain how exercise can reduce cancer risk? I don't quite get that yet. I think the exercise is more important really for cardiovascular function and just keeping…

Well, it is important for weight too, but the majority of weight is related to what you eat and calorie consumption. It's pretty much 80% of weight is what you eat.

and 20% is exercise. But it's very hard to have a really healthy diet overall, particularly in America, unfortunately, where we have so much processed food and very large portions.

The best data really is the Mediterranean diet, which has a lot of fish and vegetables and Europeans have a much

healthier diet, I think, than we do in America overall.

But the exercise component is very important for cardiovascular endurance and also helps just decrease inflammation. But those two kind of go hand in hand together.

But it's very staggering when you hear these things, particularly we know that obesity is related to the risk of breast cancer, colon cancers, of course the gynecologic cancers, but 13 cancers overall.

So whenever we see women who are diagnosed with cancer who are overweight, we counsel them to really try to lose weight so that they can hopefully prevent another cancer from happening.

Got it. And you also mentioned alcohol before, and I know in the news there's been a number of recent reports about how alcohol is much more deleterious than we originally thought.

Can you share with us some of that research and what we know now? It's really true. Some of these reports have gone back and forth about alcohol consumption, but overall, the latest data has shown that alcohol consumption appears to be more deleterious or more harmful than what we think.

Limiting as much as possible alcohol consumption is always best. Also, I should highlight the importance of the screening tests as well. Colonoscopies now need to start at the age of 45 according to the American Cancer Society for all men and women.

And of course mammograms every year are very important for women starting at the age of 40. And then women definitely need to see their gynecologist every year.

Pap smears are very important. HPV vaccines, we should not see any women. in the United States with cervical cancer and unfortunately we do but we know women prioritize many other people in their lives over themselves and so a lot of women unfortunately don't go to the gynecologist or doctor and a lot of data says that nearly half of women with gynecologic cancer has never attended a screening program so the educational component is very important to highlight the importance of these screening programs are very important especially for underserved women too.

What question haven't I asked? What's a last message you'd like to leave with people today, Sharon? Please, everyone has a woman in your life, whether it's a mother, a sister, a daughter, please tell 10 women to really take good care of yourself.

Make sure you're staying in an ideal body weight, exercising, eating healthy, doing your screening exams. We didn't really talk about the signs and symptoms of cancer, but please learn about them.

And spread the word. If you tell one person and that person tells another 10 people and we continue to talk and educate the community, that'll be so important.

Just we have to really keep the education moving so that these cancers are talked about and recognized and detected early. That's very important. Good.

So we're going to have you back for another couple of interviews, Sharon, to talk more about education and cancer prevention. So I'm really looking forward to that.

I would love to. Good. We've been talking with Dr. Sharon Lewin. She's the founder of the Lewin Fund to Fight Women's Cancers. They're committed to improving the quality of life for women facing cancer, advancing preventive strategies, and funding innovative research.

Founded in 2014, Dr. Sharon Lewin is a renowned gynecologic oncologist and surgeon and they partner with leading researchers, healthcare institutions, and advocacy organizations to expand access to care and empower patients.

And the Walk for Women's Cancers is coming up October 5th. You can participate in person in Bergen County or you can participate online And the way you can learn more is by visiting thelewinfund.org.

It's the, and then lewin, L-E-W-I-N, thelewinfund.org. If you're enjoying the show, it would mean the world to us. If you took a second to leave a five-star review on YouTube or Apple Podcasts or Spotify or wherever you listen to your podcasts, it helps more people find the show and let us know we're on the right track.

Thanks so much for being with us today. This has been Jonathan Marks with GoToHealth.

Closing Remarks and GoToHealth Outro

And remember, as we say at the end of every show, go to health. Take care. We'll see you again next time. Bye bye. Thank you for tuning in today to Go To Health.

You are one of almost 10,000 people per day who enjoy the evidence-based health information offered by our guest health experts. You can watch us on our website and YouTube and listen to us on eight podcast networks.

Be sure to join Jonathan Marks in our upcoming shows each week. If you like our show, please share this episode with your friends and colleagues. You can subscribe to the show, join our email list, send us feedback, browse through the online store, and view our library of over 150 shows at GoToHealthMedia.com.

See you next time, and remember to elevate your life with GoToHealth.