Free program offers counseling, education, and support services to Bronx cancer patients

BY GARY GOLDENBERG

When Nancy Dejoie of the Bronx was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, she had many concerns: How will surgery and chemotherapy affect my body? What does my course of treatment entail? Will I feel well enough to take care of my husband and children and to do the things I love? Fortunately, Mrs. Dejoie
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wasn’t alone. She received life-changing help from a volunteer peer counselor—a cancer survivor herself—through Bronx Oncology Living Daily (BOLD Living). Montefiore and Einstein’s free wellness and support program for local cancer patients.

“My BOLD Buddy [as peer counselors are known] called me every day to ask how I was doing and answer my questions,” says Mrs. Dejoie, a native of Haiti. “She knew exactly what I was going through and helped me in ways I cannot describe. She motivated me to fight the disease.”

Mrs. Dejoie also took advantage of BOLD Living’s classes in Spanish language, painting, and crocheting—just a sampling of the program’s diverse offerings. “They even provided tutors and school supplies for my kids,” she adds.

Taken with the program, she became a peer counselor herself even before completing her own treatment. “I wanted to give back, to be like the people who inspired me,” says Mrs. Dejoie, one of three dozen BOLD Buddies at Montefiore.

BOLD BEGINS
Credit for BOLD Living belongs to Alyson Moadel-Robblee, Ph.D., who was just 16 when she lost her mother to breast cancer. This life-changing experience ultimately led her to pursue a doctorate in health psychology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and a professor of epidemiology & population health, of medicine, of radiology, and of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Einstein. Over the years she has steadily added more services to help people in marginalized communities cope with cancer.

“From talking with patients, I learned that they wanted nutrition and fitness workshops and mind-body programs so they could take an active role in their care,” she says. “Others expressed a desire to talk with somebody who understood firsthand what they were going through or who could accompany them to treatment.”

With these requests in mind, in 2008 Dr. Moadel-Robblee launched BOLD Living. It has since evolved to include a host of wellness workshops, individual counseling and support groups led by mental-health interns, cancer screening navigators, community outreach efforts, BOLD Buddies, end-of-life doula, and BOLD Brother/Sister Peer Mentors (for teens and young adults who have parents diagnosed with cancer).

“With BOLD Living, we aim to address patients’ emotional and social support needs, to complement their medical and surgical care,” Dr. Moadel-Robblee says. “We’re here as an important piece of the healthcare system to ensure that all patients have access to culturally informed and needs-based psychosocial resources for the best quality of life and care possible as they navigate cancer diagnosis and treatment.”

Today, the BOLD Living team reaches more than 1,000 patients and community members a year. Services, available in English and Spanish, are free to all people in the Bronx affected by cancer or in need of cancer screening navigation, regardless of where they receive their medical care.

A CANCER SCARE, TWICE OVER
Glenn and Marietta Alba encountered BOLD Living in a different way. In October 2015, Glenn’s mother, Dotty Kelly, was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Preparing for the worst and hoping for the best, she sought care from Shalom Kalnicki, M.D., professor of radiation oncology and of urology at Einstein and chair of radiation oncology at Montefiore. Dr. Kalnicki found that her tumor was a good genetic match for a new immunotherapy; combining it with radiotherapy put her cancer into remission.

The Albas weren’t done with Montefiore’s oncologists just yet. Two years later, Mrs. Alba was diagnosed with stage one breast cancer. “Needless to say, it was shocking,” she says. “But I was fortunate to have the support of my husband and access to the best care.”

After undergoing a lumpectomy and radiotherapy, Mrs. Alba left Montefiore with a clean bill of health—and a deep sense of gratitude. “We wanted to find a way to give back to Montefiore and the greater Bronx community,” she says. “My parents grew up in the Bronx, and I have fond memories of family celebrations there. So it’s meaningful for me to stay connected in this way.”

Once they heard about BOLD Living, the Albas knew exactly where
“We wanted to ensure that other families who are struggling with this disease have the support they need, and that these services would be free.”

— MR. GLENN ALBA

Glenn and Marietta Alba have established a fellowship in psycho-oncology at Montefiore.

they would direct their philanthropy. “Cancer can have such a profound psychological impact on both patients and caregivers,” Mr. Alba says. “We wanted to ensure that other families who are struggling with this disease have the support they need, and that these services would be free.”

In 2020, the Albas, who now live in Florida after many years in New Jersey, established the Marietta and Glenn Alba Fellowship in Psycho-Oncology. The two-year training program provides an opportunity for a Ph.D.-level psychologist to expand BOLD Living’s clinical reach, conduct research into health disparities, and ultimately spread this model of care further afield.

THE INAUGURAL ALBA FELLOW

The first recipient of the Alba fellowship is Brittany Miller, Ph.D., a graduate of Stony Brook University’s doctoral program in social and health psychology.

“During my studies, I heard a lecture about integrating psychological care into standard cancer care alongside the work of radiologists, pathologists, and other specialists,” recalls Dr. Miller, whose dissertation focused on attitudes about preventive breast health behaviors among young adult Black women. “I thought, ‘I would love to do that type of work, particularly in an underserved community.’” As luck would have it, the Alba fellowship launched just when Dr. Miller was contemplating the next step in her career.

At Montefiore, Dr. Miller has had a hand in all aspects of BOLD Living, giving her opportunities to put her new skills into practice and broaden her professional horizons. “At Stony Brook, I focused on cancer prevention. Now I’m more involved in the actual cancer experience, from diagnosis all the way through to survivorship, which has provided me with a more comprehensive view of the experiences with this disease,” she says.

Thanks to the Alba fellowship, Dr. Miller has become immersed in the life of the community, where she’s able to put academic theories into everyday practice. Alongside BOLD interns and Buddies, she visits health fairs, food

BOLD Buddies
Weekly counseling and support groups led by mental-health counseling interns; volunteer peer counseling.

BOLD Brothers and Sisters
Free peer-mentoring program for teens and young adults who have or have had a parent or close caregiver diagnosed with cancer. In addition to the emotional support they receive through their BOLD brother/sister mentors, mentees receive career and academic guidance.

Support Groups
Groups (one in English, one in Spanish) that offer a safe place for those interested in sharing their thoughts and feelings, connecting with others, and learning how to cope with day-to-day challenges.

Wellness Workshops
Free nutrition, wellness, and fitness workshops and mind-body programs for patients and caregivers. The schedule offers yoga, dance, creative arts, meditation, health education, and more.

Cancer Screening
A program (Montefiore-Einstein BOLD Navigation) offering free assistance in scheduling screenings for breast, cervical, lung, colorectal, and prostate cancers as well as providing follow-up support for understanding screening results.

2008 The BOLD Living Program was launched to meet the needs of those affected by cancer in the Bronx.

1,000+ Number of patients and family members who receive no-cost services each year.

10+ Number of free workshops per month, conducted in person in the Bronx and virtually.
“Many people here are already dealing with housing instability, food insecurity, and other pressures. If you add the stress of having cancer, it can be overwhelming.”

— DR. BRITTANY MILLER

Many people we encounter have never had certain cancer screenings,” she says. “They don’t even know where to start. So we walk them through the process and connect them to everything they need—including BOLD Living—should they receive a cancer diagnosis.

“I understood beforehand that cancer can affect every aspect of your life, but I didn’t realize to what extent, particularly in a vulnerable community like the Bronx,” she adds. “Many people here are already dealing with housing instability, food insecurity, and other pressures. If you add the stress of having cancer, it can be overwhelming.”

Dr. Miller’s portfolio also involves three research projects, including efforts to improve cancer screening and support services in the Bronx lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community; develop a free training series for Bronx church leaders to help improve cancer outcomes among their congregants; and better understand how to encourage engagement with mental-health services among female cancer patients and cancer survivors in the Black community.

“I’ve also been learning so much about the various cultures here, and their different beliefs about cancer and mental-health care,” she continues. “For some groups, talking about these topics is taboo. If you want to engage people and promote healthy behaviors, you have to develop culturally sensitive strategies. Our interns and BOLD Buddies, who reflect the diversity in the community, have been a great resource. The Buddies in particular bring so much wisdom from their own experiences with cancer. I’ve learned a lot from them.”

PART OF THE FAMILY
One of those fonts of wisdom is Harmon Kennedy, a longtime Bronx resident who received a colorectal cancer diagnosis in 2011. Mr. Kennedy became a BOLD Buddy a few years later, after treatment brought his disease under control. “It’s great to have friends and family to talk to, but so often, they don’t really understand,” he says.

“If they haven’t gone through cancer, they don’t get it. You want to know what is going to happen to you, what chemo is like. Ten years after my last treatment, I can still remember them sticking needle into me. I remember the taste of chemo in my mouth. That’s what I can share with patients. When they meet me and hear my story, I can see the relief. I would have liked to have talked to someone when I was diagnosed.”

While some patients need only a few months with a BOLD Buddy, others stay in touch for years. “I knew Charlie, my first patient, for almost five years,” Mr. Kennedy says. “We became friends. Charlie passed on a few years ago, but at least I got to say goodbye. For Buddies, the hardest thing is the people you lose, especially the ones you don’t get to say goodbye to, like Elaine. She just stopped contacting me, and I didn’t know why. She wasn’t the type not to stay in touch. I learned later from her doctor that she had passed away. It affected me badly. I had survivor’s remorse. It was like losing a member of the family.”

Still, Mr. Kennedy feels an inseparable bond to BOLD and its mission. “Every cancer patient deserves a Buddy,” he says.

1960s
Jack Katz, M.D. ’60, is now in the private practice of psychiatry after a long career in academic medicine. He has retired from basketball and singles tennis. (His knees are no longer up to it.) He still looks back fondly on his four years at Einstein.

David White, M.D. ’63, lives in Eugene, Ore., with his wife of 56 years, and they continue to enjoy each other’s company. His youngest granddaughter is in college, starting her premed studies.

1970s
Doug Drossman, M.D. ’70, is a professor emeritus of medicine and psychiatry, specializing in gastroenterology, and has been developing programs to teach communication skills to optimize the patient-provider relationship. He just released a book that he wrote with his patient Jeanah Ruddy called Gut Feelings: Disorders of Gut-Brain Interaction and the Doctor-Patient Relationship.

Stewart Albert, M.D. ’71, is still practicing, teaching, and researching. He also plays senior handball and tennis, and is learning how to cook; his specialty is stew. He hopes to travel again soon.

Einstein Alumna Named Editor of Journal of Clinical Investigation

Elizabeth McNally, M.D., Ph.D. ’90, has been elected editor of the Journal of Clinical Investigation (JCI), a leading peer-reviewed medical journal aimed at defining disease pathways and treatments. She is the first woman to hold the title of editor in the journal’s nearly 100-year history. Her five-year term began March 1, 2022. Dr. McNally directs the Center for Genetic Medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, where she studies inherited disorders that affect cardiac and skeletal muscle function.

After graduating from Einstein’s Medical Scientist Training Program with both M.D. and Ph.D. degrees, Dr. McNally completed her residency and fellowship in cardiovascular medicine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and her postdoctoral fellowship in genetics at Boston Children’s Hospital. She was elected to the Association of American Physicians in 2006 and is serving as its 2021–22 president. In 2021 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and to the National Academy of Medicine.

Members of the Einstein community have played important roles at JCI in recent years. The current editor, Rexford Ahima, M.D., Ph.D., director of endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism at the
Arnold Bodner, M.D. ’71, has been vol- unteering at a COVID-19 vaccine center in Essex County, N.J., and spends time with his wife of 30-plus years, Rosemary.

Roland Einhorn, M.D. ’71, retired in 2012 and has been happily married for 40 years to his wife, Barbara. He reports that their daughter, Lisa, is a pediatric anesthesiologist at Duke University Hospital, and that they have three beautiful grandchildren. He lives in Jupiter, Fla., but also maintains a home in Baltimore.

Hyam Leffert, M.D. ’71, has been in La Jolla, Calif., since graduating and has yet to retire. He wishes his fellow classmates long life, health, and happiness.

Gary Lotner, M.D. ’73, is enjoying retirement after more than 40 years in the practice of allergy, asthma, and clinical immunology in Atlanta. He has two children and five grandchildren (ages 3 months to 11 years), all within a short drive. His new book, a humorous memoir called Reflections of a Life in Medicine: The Ups, Downs, and All Arounds, is a collection of vignettes about his earlier years in training and as a young physician.

Karen Lowenstein Kade, M.D. ’76, retired more than two years ago after selling her dermatology practice in Miami. She and her husband, Paul, moved to the west coast of Florida and are living in the Sarasota area. They have three grandchildren. Both of their daughters and their families live in Philadelphia.

Howard Reinstein, M.D. ’78, was recently named physician of the year by the medical staff at the Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Center in California. He also received the Heart of Gold Award from the Child Development Institute. His daughter, son-in-law, and two of his grandchildren have moved back to Los Angeles after many years in San Francisco.

IN MEMORIAM

Justice Felice K. Shea, a member of the board of trustees for Montefiore Health System for 25 years, died Dec. 27, 2021, at age 98 in New York City. Justice Shea was an inspiring and fierce advocate for equity and social justice and a generous humanitarian. A trailblazer for women in law, Justice Shea opened opportunities for others throughout her lifetime of public service. After working as an attorney with the Legal Aid Society, she served as a judge in the Civil and Family Courts before she served as a judge in the Civil and Family Courts before her election to the New York State Supreme Court, from which she retired at the end of 1999. When speaking of Montefiore—where her parents also sat on the board—she said, “Healthcare is a human right. And good healthcare, respectfully given and patient-centered, is what Montefiore is all about. To me, that is social justice.” Having done so much for so many, Justice Shea left a legacy that will live on at Montefiore and Einstein.

Pratibha Koirala, M.D., Ph.D. ’18, was recently elected to the board of trustees (resident and fellow seat) of the American Medical Association (AMA). Born in the foothills of Nepal, Dr. Koirala had experiences as an immigrant and in her work with underserved individuals that are reflected in the deep value she places on diversity and equity in medicine. Dr. Koirala joined the AMA as a medical student in the Bronx and has held multiple leadership roles at the state and national levels, including on the executive council of the Medical Society of the State of New York. She is currently the resident and fellow member of the board of directors of the AMA’s independent bipartisan political action committee.

Frances Cerullo, age 87, a recently retired psychoeducational specialist at the Children’s Evaluation and Rehabilitation Center at Einstein, whose work with children who had reading disabilities and behavioral problems spanned nearly 45 years, Oct. 27, 2021, Mount Kisco, N.Y.

Ricardo Perez Dulzaides, age 33, a fourth-year Einstein M.D./Ph.D. student who had a passion for clinical investigation and was an advocate for diversity and the underserved, Nov. 12, 2021, Bronx, N.Y.

Babatunde (“Tunde”) A. Eboreime, M.D. ’71, a native of Nigeria and Princeton University graduate and an obstetrician-gynecologist who served generations of families in California for more than 35 years, Dec. 10, 2021, Pasadena, Calif.

Wendyann Ocasio, age 52, a community representative for the Einstein Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, July 7, 2021, Bronx, N.Y.

Clint K. Potter, M.D. ’97, age 61, a family medicine physician, founder of Advanced Individualized Medicine of Naples, Naples Pride Center board member, and advocate for the LGBTQ community, Aug. 18, 2021, Naples, Fla.
Visionary Educator Albert Kuperman, Ph.D.

Albert S. Kuperman, Ph.D., who served as the associate dean for educational affairs at Einstein for nearly 40 years and was a professor emeritus of molecular pharmacology, died Dec. 21, 2021, at age 90 in New York City.

Dr. Kuperman shaped many aspects of medical education at Einstein. His legacies include the global health program, the social medicine course he helped medical students establish; and Einstein’s art and literary magazine, Ad Libitum, which he championed as an important creative outlet for all members of the campus community.

“Dr. Kuperman was one of my Einstein role models,” noted Gordon F. Tomaselli, M.D., the Marilyn and Horace K. Belfer—in memorializing Mrs. Belfer’s own—her son, Kenneth Endel Belfer, and her family also endowed the Diane Belfer, Cypres & Endelson Families Faculty Scholar in Diabetes Research and a professor of microbiology & immunology and of medicine, recalls Mrs. Belfer’s “hope and kindness” throughout their decade-long partnership. “Her support of research,” adds Dr. Di Lorenzo, “has had an immeasurable value.” Mrs. Belfer and her family also endowed the Diane and Arthur B. Belfer Faculty Scholar in Cancer Research.

The Einstein family joins Mrs. Belfer’s many friends and colleagues in their celebration of a life of kindness, generosity, and service to others. Mrs. Belfer is survived by her son, and his wife, Sherry; her daughter, Kathi Cypres, and her husband, Gary; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren; and her stepson, Robert A. Belfer. Her husband, Stanley M. Katz Dean at Einstein and a member of the Class of 1982. “He made sure that medical students got to experience clinical medicine on the wards within our first 18 months, which was not the general practice at the time but is now a common aim.”

Born and raised in the Bronx, Dr. Kuperman earned his bachelor’s degree at New York University and his Ph.D. at Cornell University. He was a fellow in nerve muscle physiology at the U.S. Naval Research Institute and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in pharmacology with the U.S. Public Health Service at Cornell Medical College. He was a visiting scholar at Columbia University’s Teachers College before joining the Einstein faculty.

Dr. Kuperman is survived by his daughters Meredith (Chuck) and Laura (John); granddaughters Hayley and Caroline (Paul); and sister Thelma (Gilbert).

Professor of Biochemistry John Blanchard, Ph.D.

John Blanchard, Ph.D., professor of biochemistry and the Dan Dunciger Chair in Biochemistry at Einstein, died Nov. 5, 2021, at age 67 in Pelham, N.Y. A talented enzymologist, Dr. Blanchard was a dedicated teacher and a mentor to young scientists from all over the world.

In 2009 Dr. Blanchard identified a novel drug combination that was the growth of XDR-TB in laboratory culture. His drug combination has saved the lives of several patients with XDR-TB.

In 2014 Dr. Blanchard identified a novel therapy for drug-resistant TB. In 2017 Einstein awarded him the Marshall S. Horwitz, M.D., Faculty Prize for Research Excellence.

Dr. Blanchard was born in Connecticut and grew up in Cheshire and New Haven. He graduated from Lake Forest College in Illinois in 1975 and received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1978. He arrived at Einstein in 1979 as a postdoctoral fellow and later joined the faculty as an assistant professor, earning full professor status in 1993.

Dr. Blanchard is survived by his wife of 41 years, Kim; children Virginia and Charles (Sarah); and brother W. Scott Blanchard (Jenny).

Remembering Diane L. Belfer
Einstein Board of Trustees Member

The Einstein and Montefiore communities lost a devoted friend on Jan. 2, 2022. Diane L. Belfer, longtime Einstein Board of Trustees member, who led with grace, sincerity, and goodwill, died at her home in Palm Beach, Fla., on her 94th birthday.

In addition to her 32-year service as a Trustee, Mrs. Belfer also served in Einstein’s Women’s Division. Her wide-ranging philanthropic support (see “Belfer Building,” next page) is a testament to her remarkable influence on Einstein and its people.

Teresa Di Lorenzo, Ph.D.—the Diane Belfer, Cypres & Endelson Families Faculty Scholar in Diabetes Research and a professor of microbiology & immunology and of medicine, recalls Mrs. Belfer’s “hope and kindness” throughout their decade-long partnership. “Her support of research,” adds Dr. Di Lorenzo, “has had an immeasurable value.” Mrs. Belfer and her family also endowed the Diane Belfer and her family also endowed the Diane and Arthur B. Belfer Faculty Scholar in Cancer Research.

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The Belfer Building Turns 50

Urgently needed for a growing College of Medicine: more lab space, classrooms for basic-science instruction, and an auditorium for lectures. The solution: The Arthur B. and Diane Belfer Educational Center for Health Sciences, which opened in 1972 and permitted increased student enrollment. This photo, looking northwest from Eastchester Road toward Morris Park Avenue, shows the 15-story building (in center of photo) as it neared completion. The new center expanded the department of community health, grew the audiovisual department, and instituted a computer and biomathematics center. The Belfer Building also centralized the office of the dean and Einstein’s administrative services—until then scattered throughout the campus—and provided space for an office of education. The $10.2 million structure was paid for by a $3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, along with funding from New York City and New York State and a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Belfer, who were significant Einstein supporters (see facing page).

The Einstein family joins Mrs. Belfer’s many friends and colleagues in their celebration of a life of kindness, generosity, and service to others. Mrs. Belfer is survived by her son, and his wife, Sherry; her daughter, Kathi Cypres, and her husband, Gary; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren; and her stepson, Robert A. Belfer. Her husband, Stanley M. Katz Dean at Einstein and a member of the Class of 1982. “He made sure that medical students got to experience clinical medicine on the wards within our first 18 months, which was not the general practice at the time but is now a common aim.”

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In 2009 Dr. Blanchard identified a promising new treatment for extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB). He found that a combination of two drugs (clavulenate and meropenem) halted the growth of XDR-TB in laboratory culture. His drug combination has saved the lives of several patients with XDR-TB.

In 2014 the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases awarded Dr. Blanchard a four-year, $2.7 million grant to continue his efforts to find novel therapies for drug-resistant TB. In 2017 Einstein awarded him the Marshall S. Horwitz, M.D., Faculty Prize for Research Excellence.

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