

JDPA

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SDPA NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

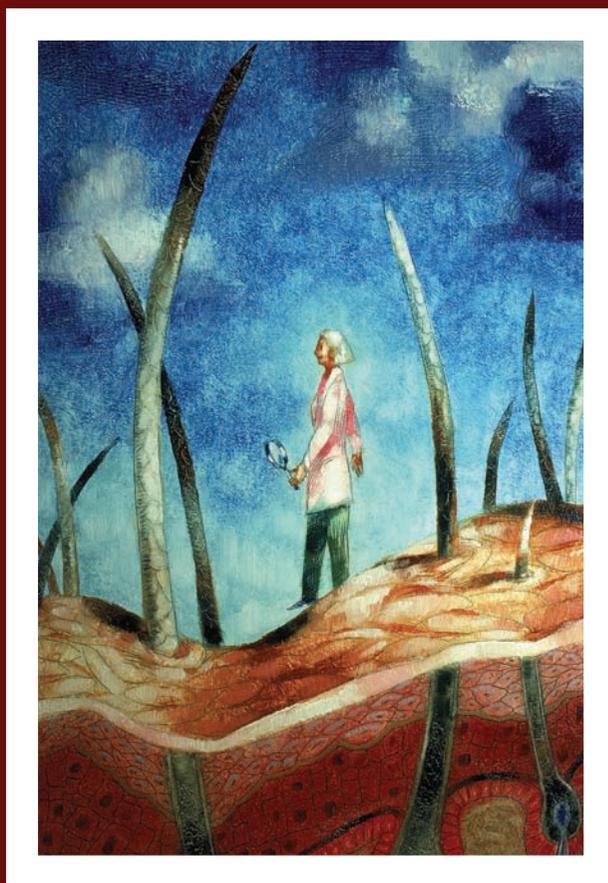
DERMATOLOGY PA NEWS AND NOTES

CLINICAL DERMATOLOGY

SURGICAL DERMATOLOGY

COSMETIC DERMATOLOGY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



SUPPLEMENT
for the
Cutaneous Lymphoma
Foundation



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JDPA

Journal of Dermatology for Physician Assistants

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FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

My Personal Journey with Cutaneous Lymphoma

By Susan Thornton

It was at the fairly young age of thirty-one that my journey with cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) began. As so many CTCL patients do, I began with seeing several dermatologists over the course of a year. I was eventually fortunate enough to be referred to Dr. Eric Vonderheid, one of the few specialists treating cutaneous lymphoma at the time. It was 1991 and I was diagnosed with mycosis fungoides. With all that I was involved in at that time in my life, the hopes, dreams and life goals I was pursuing, this diagnosis stopped me cold. I was just thirty-one, how could I have cancer?

At first, this diagnosis was just devastating. So many tough emotions. It took a tremendous physical, mental, and emotional toll on me. Eventually, I wanted and needed to overcome these feelings of hopelessness because, despite this diagnosis, I wanted to live the best life I could. So, being a problem solver, I began to look at my cancer diagnosis in this light: how do I now begin to solve this problem?

Under Dr. Vonderheid's watchful eye, I began PUVA treatment immediately. This treatment, along with many others, kept my CTCL under control for quite a few years. The itching was challenging at times, but different topical treatments provided some relief.

In 1997 the disease turned aggressive, and I found myself in stage IV looking at a bone marrow transplant as my only option. After a year of struggling, I began the preparatory process for the transplant by taking medications and entering into three months of radiation therapy to get the tumors under control. The summer of 1998 was spent traveling to downtown Philadelphia every day for radiation treatment that left me hairless. I learned that my head is quite a nice round shape!

Fortunately for me, the three months of steady radiation and medications did the trick, and by my 40th birthday in September, the CTCL was under control once again. To celebrate, I completed the Philadelphia Distance Run (a 1/2 marathon consisting of 13.1 miles) and threw myself a 40th birthday party, baldhead and all.

Feeling very lucky at this point, I responded to a Team in Training (TNT) flyer as I was thinking about participating in my first triathlon. For those of you who may not be familiar with TNT, it is a program offered by The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society that provides hands-on training for marathons,

half-marathons, triathlons, hiking events, or 100-mile bike rides. The pull for me was very strong to give something back so I jumped into the TNT world by training for and finishing the Chicago Triathlon in the summer of 2001 while raising over \$5,000 for leukemia and lymphoma research. One of my proudest accomplishments was finishing the 2004 Pacific Crest 1/2 Ironman Triathlon finishing in 8.5 hours and not last! Not bad for a 45 year-old!

I discovered the Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation in 2007 when my new doctor, Stuart Lessin, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Foundation, suggested that I might be interested in becoming involved. It was an honor to be asked to join the Foundation Board in early 2008. In June 2011, I made a transition from the Board to become the Foundation's new Management Consultant for Programs and Services, a full-time role that allows me to work closely with patients on an ongoing basis – I love it! I feel so blessed to be working directly with the Foundation each day to enhance its programs, which bring life-changing outcomes to CTCL patients.

The joy of living a full and wonderful life, in spite of being treated for CTCL, keeps me going.

The joy of living a full and wonderful life, in spite of being treated for CTCL, keeps me going. My message to every person reading this, whether you are a patient, caregiver, healthcare provider, or anyone interested in our mission, is this: First, thank you for being a part of the Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation community. Second, I encourage you to learn more about and become involved in all that we are doing to improve the lives of people affected by cutaneous lymphoma. Getting involved and helping others is extraordinarily empowering and life enriching, which has certainly been the case for me. It gives you something to think about each day beyond the symptoms you may be experiencing, beyond the day-to-day frustrations that you are coping with. It helps you positively impact the lives of others while, at the same time, positively impacting your own. 🕒



Susan Thornton is a native of Philadelphia. She spent the last 27 years in the healthcare information technology field in various consulting, sales, and marketing positions. Susan holds a Marketing/Management degree from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, Certification in Fundraising from the University of Pennsylvania,

and recently received her certificate as an Archetypal Consultant from the CMED Institute in Chicago.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Susan has been active in many non-profit organizations in the Philadelphia region, holding Board positions at the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Eastern PA Chapter, and was one of the original members of the Tristate Multisport Association. Susan's love of sports, and in particular triathlons, has given her the opportunity to coach with the local Team in Training triathlon teams, become Race Director for the Patriot's Triathlon, and mentor many beginning triathletes.

In addition to her management-consulting role with the Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation, Susan has launched a new venture, Let's Live, dedicated to inspiring and empowering people to explore life beyond cancer. Her Adventure Quest courses, which fall under the Let's Live umbrella, show cancer survivors how to live life worth jumping out of bed for. Adventure Quest is a series of programs for long-term cancer survivors and will be launched in 2012. You can learn more about Susan and her inspirational story at www.letslivetoday.com.

TAKE HOME POINTS for DERM PAs:

By Steven K. Shama, MD, MPH

1. I have often wondered, but truthfully not often enough, what a patient is feeling when I give them a diagnosis that is clearly bad news. Susan writes "...this diagnosis was just devastating." She adds that it brought forth "many tough emotions" with feelings of hopelessness. How often are we truly "there" as healthcare practitioners when patients go through these emotions? How often do we ask these simple and innocent questions, "How are you doing?" and "Is there anything I can do to make things better?" And how often do we really take the time to wait for a heartfelt answer? We need to "be there" more often, to listen more deeply, and to really mean it when we ask, "How can I help?"
2. Susan is an inspiration to us all. Her physical feats and emotional strengths should leave us in awe. While we cannot expect all of our patients to achieve as much as Susan, we must hope and believe that they all have such deep physical and emotional reserves. It is our obligation to encourage them to tap into these reserves as a complement to our formal treatments. We also need to be humbled in our patients' presence, since they are messengers from the universe teaching us that we too have these powerful resources, should we ever need to use them to help heal ourselves.

Dermatology Physician Assistants



Physician Assistants (PAs) in dermatology play a number of varied and vital roles.

PAs are medical providers licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. From patient care and education, to skin surgery, treatment of chronic skin conditions, and cosmetic procedures, PAs are dynamic members of the healthcare team. PAs practice in every medical and surgical specialty and have been collaborating with dermatologists for 30 years, providing a wide variety of services. These include diagnosing, prescribing medications, ordering and interpreting lab tests, wound suturing, and medical or surgical treatment of a wide variety of clinical diseases. As with all PAs, dermatology PAs are legally and ethically bound to practice only under physician supervision.

PAs are trained in intensive, accredited education programs.

Because of the close working relationship that PAs have with physicians, PAs are educated in the medical model designed to mirror and complement physician training. PAs take a national certification examination and to maintain their certification, they must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and take a recertification exam every six years. Graduation from an accredited PA program and passage of the national certifying exam are required for state licensure.

How a PA practices dermatology varies with training, experience, and state law. In addition, the scope of the PA's responsibilities corresponds to the supervising physician's scope of practice. In general, a PA will see many of the same types of patients as the physician. Referral to the physician, or close consultation between the PA and physician, is based on the dynamic relationship between the physician and PA.

The Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants (SDPA) is a non-profit professional organization, composed of members who provide dermatologic care or have an interest in the medical specialty of dermatology. Fellow members provide medical services under the supervision of a board certified dermatologist.

More information can be found at www.dermpa.org and www.aapa.org.

