

Collision Course

Each year, thousands of Georgians will have lung cancer well before they know it.

The stars were aligned perfectly for Jacqueline Patrick on Aug. 2, 2005, when she was involved in a head-on collision during her drive home from work. She was taken to a hospital near her home in Cherokee County, where doctors made the discovery that saved her life—she had an orange-sized mass in her right lung that turned out to be lung cancer.

“I had the same type of cancer that Dana Reeves had, and the doctors estimated it had been there for three months,” says Patrick. “If the doctors hadn’t found it, I probably would have died by spring of 2006. I was very, very blessed to have had that car accident.”



According to the Lung Cancer Alliance of Georgia, lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer death among men and women in Georgia, constituting 30 percent of all cancer deaths in the state. Surprisingly, it kills one and a half times more Georgia women than breast cancer and almost three times more Georgia men than prostate cancer. And yet the public is still largely unaware of the prevalence of the disease.

Patrick is working to change that. She had surgery that removed 75 percent of the affected lung approximately two weeks after the tumor was discovered, and after finishing chemotherapy early in 2006, the working mother of three teenage boys decided to devote whatever free time she had to spreading the word: lung cancer is a stealthy killer affecting smokers and non-smokers alike.

“I was never a smoker, nor was I exposed to second hand smoke,” says Patrick. “And I had virtually no symptoms. I had a lot going on in my life at the time, and I attributed shortness of breath to stress. Never for a moment would I have suspected I had lung cancer.”

As with any cancer, early detection of lung cancer dramatically improves prognosis. But because the symptoms are not easily recognized, more than 70 percent of lung cancer diagnoses are made when the disease is no longer curable. Unfortunately, early detection of lung cancer is not currently funded or supported by the State of Georgia or the federal government.

Today, Patrick serves as director for the Lung Cancer Alliance of Georgia, which is affiliated with the Lung Cancer Alliance, the only national non-profit organization dedicated solely to providing support and advocacy to lung cancer patients and those at risk for the disease. She believes that through education, the public can become empowered to bring lung cancer the attention that it deserves.

“Anyone can make a difference,” Patrick says. “You can start by contacting your state representative, the Governor’s office, or the Georgia Cancer Coalition. Or, you can simply contact the Lung Cancer Alliance of Georgia and our organization will help mobilize forces. Working together, we can change the lung cancer statistics in our state.”

For more information about lung cancer, or to view a lung cancer report card for Georgia, visit <http://www.lungcanceralliance.org>.

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