

Bobbi Filipiak

LUNG CANCER



My journey began in 2013 following the birth of our baby girl. I was considered a high risk pregnancy... apparently, 40 is old! This meant I would be monitored more closely with the help of monthly ultrasounds. Things were going so well that my OB GYN said we could just skip the last ultrasound, but my intuition told me to go. I am so grateful for that. During that ultrasound we realized she had gone from 90 percent in gestational size to 10 percent in just three weeks.

I was rushed to the hospital for five hours of rapid fire tests which revealed HELLP syndrome (Hemolysis, Elevated Liver Enzymes, Low Level Platelets). As they prepped me for an emergency C-section, I was anxious but somehow I knew she would be just fine. After a five hour surgery, I finally met our tiny but mighty baby girl, Katherine Grace Filipiak or "Kate the Great".

During recovery, I experienced tremors and severe headaches. After three days, we called for a neurologist, who ordered a CT scan. The next day we were told that the scan identified something of concern that had nothing to do with my brain. The CT tech had misread the orders and inadvertently scanned not only my brain but also my chest which revealed a spot on my right lung just one centimeter above the base of the scan. That led to a bronchoscopy biopsy.

I never imagined I would hear the words, "YOU HAVE CANCER." I had stage 3b adenocarcinoma non-small cell lung cancer. What?! Adno-what? Lung cancer? How could this be?!

Bobbi Filipiak was a patient speaker at the ATS 2018 International Conference in San Diego, California.

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The doctor told me my treatment plan would be aggressive. I thought, “Perfect.... I’ve got this!” My initial biopsy didn’t reveal anything of substance relative to mutations that available therapies targeted , so for the next six months, with a newborn at home and the world’s most amazing husband, I began six weeks of daily radiation, nine weeks of chemo, and a wedge-resection surgery to extract part of my lung. That was followed by a few more weeks of chemo, which kept me in remission for 18 months.

During a follow up scan on my two year cancer-versary, my cancer was found to have spread to my kidney, the left lung and my brain. This time, a CT guided needle-biopsy of the lung determined it had metastasized. It was now stage 4, inoperable lung cancer with a high (70) PDL-1 expression, making me a great candidate for immunotherapy.

I began my first clinical trial at Cleveland Clinic. This course of treatment was eventually FDA approved and worked for me for two years. In early 2017, my cancer spread again and another biopsy was performed. This time we identified a new mutation that made me eligible for a new Poziotinib trial at MDA in Houston. I began the treatment Aug. 2, 2017.

In summary, I’ve learned to partner with my medical team, strive for a plan B, never underestimate intuition, and stop to acknowledge all the silver linings along the way. I believe everyone is dealt a card or two in life that will pose our greatest challenges. Knowledge is power so I stay informed. I lean on my team of doctors and I never ever lose hope. I truly believe that stage 4 lung cancer, formerly called “end stage cancer,” is purely a diagnosis, not a prognosis. With the advancements in modern medicine and the commitment to research and development, the future looks brighter than ever. ■

Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States and will claim more lives this year than cancer of the breast, prostate, and colon combined. Lung cancers are generally divided into two major types, small cell lung cancer and non-small cell lung cancer, classified based on how it looks under a microscope. Non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) includes squamous cell carcinoma, large cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma. Small cell cancer (SCLC) tends to grow more quickly than non-small cell cancer. Because it grows more quickly, SCLC is often found when it has spread outside of the lung. Symptoms of lung cancer can vary from person to person. Symptoms of lung cancer include:

- A cough that gets worse or does not go away.
- More trouble breathing (shortness of breath) than usual.
- Coughing up blood.
- Chest pain.
- Hoarse voice.
- Frequent lung infections.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Weight loss for no known reason.
- Swelling of your face or arms.

Learn more: *ATS Patient Education Series. "Lung Cancer" New York, NY. www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/lung-cancer-intro.pdf*