**How Patient-Centricity Drives Innovation**

By Andy Schmeltz

A few years ago, my life-long friend Brad lost his wife and my friend, Lauren, to breast cancer. Brad and I grew up together in Pittsburgh and were roommates in NYC during our formative post-college years. It was during this time that I started dating my wife, Dayna, and Brad started dating Lauren. Our courtships ran in parallel, our weddings were just a few months apart, and our families grew in tandem.

Until the moment everything changed. Lauren was diagnosed with BRCA-positive triple negative breast cancer at age 40, had a double-mastectomy, chemo, and radiation. The cancer was temporarily contained. But then it metastasized. Within three years from her diagnosis, Lauren’s fight was over. The loss was devastating to Brad, to his two girls, then 15 and 13 years old, and to our entire community of friends and family.

I’m inspired every day by the memory of Lauren, and I’m motivated by the quest to transform the standard of care for patients like her. Patients – and their loved ones – are the reason we persist through setbacks and failures as we search for new and better medicines.

In oncology, patients don’t just inspire innovation. They drive it. By its very nature, precision medicine – the cutting edge of oncology – focuses our efforts on people with distinct underlying biological characteristics. Targeted medicines represent our best hope for advancing in cancer care. And viewing patients as richly complicated individuals who live within a wide variety of contexts is what will push precision medicine – and our success as a company – forward.

In recent years, Pfizer has expanded its efforts to listen to patients across communities, including advocates and opinion leaders. Their voices have directly led to improvements in how we design and carry out our clinical trials and programs.

For example, we have minimized the burdens on patients participating in studies, enhanced patient safety e-reminders, revised the use of wearable devices to capture more data from patients and rewritten our consent forms (as well as some of our research abstracts) to be more patient-friendly. We’ve also created a patient gratitude program, because while helping patients is our mission, the patients who undergo our clinical trials and share their experiences help us immeasurably.

There are 35 million people in the world who are living with cancer. Being physically sick is hard enough, but cancer can bring a host of other challenges – anxiety over money and jobs, difficulties scheduling and getting to multiple appointments, and the general emotional turmoil that comes with a devastating diagnosis.

Contemplating the patient experience in a holistic way is what drove Pfizer colleagues to develop two new programs available in the U.S.: [This is Living with Cancer™](https://www.thisislivingwithcancer.com/?cmp=9cbafa77-5c88-4958-9ba0-28e32aff6f73) and [Pfizer Oncology Together™](https://www.pfizeroncologytogether.com/?source=google&HBX_PK=s_pfizer%20oncology%20together&o=206818585%7C406519994%7C0&skwid=43700026569291714&cmp=b828b9bc-5d58-4689-a534-d21163cc3347). This is Living with Cancer includes LivingWith™, a free app that guides people as they manage life with cancer. It helps patients and caregivers store documents, track how they’re feeling, communicate with loved ones and ask for help with daily tasks in one streamlined place.

Pfizer Oncology Together is a first-of-its-kind program for patients taking Pfizer Oncology medicines that offers dedicated ‘Care Champions’ with social-work background to help navigate the complexities that accompany treatment, such as identifying resources to help find emotional support, and workplace transition, transportation and financial assistance.

Patient experiences are sparking new questions and driving innovation throughout our industry. The more we understand people living with cancer…aka patients, whether it’s on the level of their biological mechanisms or their higher motivations and mindsets, the more positive change we can bring to them, and the more precious lives we can save.