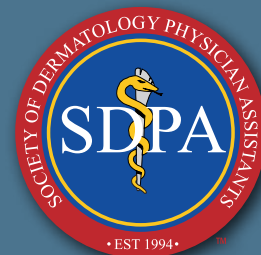


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Journal of Dermatology for Physician Assistants



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FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Katie's Story

My Ocular Melanoma Diagnosis Is My Opportunity To Spread Hope

In May of 2013, on the way to my ophthalmologist appointment, my left bra strap unhooked. I said to myself, "Well... hopefully that's the worst thing that happens to me today." I always visited my ophthalmologist regularly, mostly to get my contacts prescription but this time was different. I had noticed my lower left peripheral vision was disappearing. On top of that,

"Because of organizations like the MRF, patients like me have a community, a voice and a hope for a cure."

I noticed a black line dancing across my windshield while driving a co-worker and myself to a client meeting. When she didn't see the line, I decided to make an appointment with my eye doctor. I was given a worrisome referral to a specialist after my ophthalmologist noticed a bump on my retina. I prayed that I didn't have a retinal tear or macular degeneration, which runs in my family. The news I would receive that day, unfortunately, would be very different.

The specialist dilated my eyes - for the second time that day, and to his and my surprise, found ocular melanoma in my left eye. I was at a complete loss for words. The only thing I could think about was my mom, who I lost to pancreatic cancer when I was young. I knew that I could lean on my wonderful, supportive family during this difficult time, but there was no hiding the fact that I was scared.

Luckily, after further testing, my ocular melanoma was classified as Stage 1A. I had caught it early. Following a week of radiation therapy that left me blind in my left eye, I was considered cancer-free with only a 2 percent chance of recurrence. After what was the biggest whirlwind of my life, and even though I was grieving the loss of my eyesight, I couldn't have been more relieved. In just 22 days, I had become a cancer survivor.

Fast forward to November of 2014. I had kept up with regular visits to my eye doctor, continued working, and as luck would have it I met the love of my life, Nick. That November, I went back in to the doctor for a routine scan when they noticed something suspicious on my liver. My stomach dropped. Later that afternoon, just two days before Thanksgiving, my oncologist called to confirm my melanoma had spread to my liver and was diagnosed as Stage IV.



The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is the largest independent organization devoted to melanoma. The MRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Committed to the support of medical research in finding effective treatments and eventually a cure for melanoma, the MRF also educates patients, caregivers, and physicians about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of melanoma. The MRF's website is the premier source for melanoma information seekers.

The MRF is also an active advocate for the melanoma community, helping to raise awareness of this disease and the need for a cure. Its online forum - the Melanoma Patients Information Page (MPIP) - is the oldest and largest community of people affected by melanoma and is hosted through the MRF. It is designed to provide support and information to caregivers, patients, family, and friends.

Melanoma Research Foundation

Contact Information: www.melanoma.org

1411 K Street, NW Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005

MRF Blog: www.melanoma.org/about-us/news-press-room/blog

Phone: (800) 673-1290

On Thanksgiving, Nick proposed to me in front of my entire family. Since that moment, I have not stopped fighting. Over the next several weeks, I enrolled in a clinical trial in New York City, away from my friends and family in Denver. Oh, and I also planned a wedding. In February of 2015, Nick and I were married. For the next few months I continued to travel to New York for appointments.



Then I found the Melanoma Research Foundation's (MRF) #EyeGetDilated campaign that brings awareness to ocular melanoma. Knowing that there is a community of people who know what I'm going through and are working hard to bring attention to this rare form of melanoma is extremely comforting and motivating. It's important for me to encourage my friends and family to get dilated eye exams because when most people think of melanoma, they think of

their skin. However, ocular melanoma accounts for 5-12 percent of all melanoma cases. While it is a rare disease, it is still definitely more common than people think.

Since my second diagnosis, I have entered three clinical trials and endured two liver embolization procedures that are aimed at shrinking tumors. While this process has been emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausting, I have so many reasons to stay positive. My amazing family and husband have kept me going when I didn't think I could. May 16th 2007 will mark four years since my initial ocular melanoma diagnosis. I will be participating in Melanoma Awareness Month with the MRF and I encourage you all to join me! Because of organizations like the MRF, patients like me have a community, a voice, and a hope for a cure. 🙏

Take Home Points for Derm PAs:

By Steven K. Shama, MD, MPH, FAAD

1. I am always humbled with the brave and positive outlook that many of our patients who are diagnosed with very serious medical diagnoses have. Throughout my years as a provider, I have been absolutely convinced that these individuals are messengers for us as clinicians, sent as a reminder of the preciousness and vitality of our lives.
2. While most clinicians would assume that a 2% likelihood of recurrence is essentially a cure, it still means that two out of every 100 patients will develop a recurrence, and that is a fact that our patients must hear.

How we choose to incorporate into our conversation the raw facts versus the message of the pureness of the hope of a cure is up to each clinician. However, it must be done and it should be done with grace and compassion.

3. Katie reminds us that we are not, nor should we be, our patient's main source of emotional support. Her family, friends, and her involvement in the Melanoma Research Foundation give her a reason to live a fulfilling life with the hope for a cure.