

Chairman Nelson, Senator Collins, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Mary Dempsey-I am the Assistant Director and Co-Founder of the Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing. We are located in Lewiston, Maine.

My Mother, Amanda Dempsey, was diagnosed with Ovarian Granulose Tumor Cell Cancer on August 19, 1997. Over the course of seventeen years, my mother had a total of twelve recurrences. As my family navigated the first two recurrences, we realized the necessity for emotional and community support that patients and families need when going through this unknown experience. My brother, Patrick, assisted in the partnership with Central Maine Medical Center where we joined with an experienced Oncology Social Worker to develop the concept for a local cancer support center that was caring, warm, and provided opportunities for healing, and would be accessible to anyone impacted by Cancer.

I understand first hand that a cancer diagnosis feels like a death sentence. There have been tremendous advances in the field of oncology that now allow more people to live with this disease as a Chronic illness. My mom lived this experience, and I shared it with her as her primary caregiver. In this role, I experienced first-hand the impact Cancer had on every part of my life. For me, it really became a full time job; navigating resources, understanding the medical world, and coping with the profound changes in our lives.

While physicians and other oncology professionals provide great medical care to treat the disease, cancer patients and their families need additional support to treat the person and those who surround them. Cancer affects the whole person and the whole family.

At the Dempsey Center, we understand that when resources are strained the first thing that is often sacrificed is the emotional care needed to endure ourselves through tough times. As a result, the Dempsey Center offers an array of services including professional cancer support, education, and integrative medicine services for all ages, free of charge and regardless of where the patient received their treatment. Much like other Cancer centers we also provide many opportunities for people to give back such as creating comfort items, donating time and skills to help the Dempsey Center operate, and of course volunteering at our annual Dempsey Challenge.

Patrick has helped sustain the Center financially through not only his own generous contributions but his vision of the Dempsey Challenge, our largest annual fundraising event. The Challenge is an event, not a race, where patients, families and communities from all around the world come together to support this cause, which is common in many households. At this event participants can walk, run or cycle at their own pace. Like the Dempsey Center itself, the event has more depth than what it may appear. It is a community celebration, and more importantly a recognition that we are in this together. Every year since 2009, my mother, has lead the Amgen Breakaway from Cancer Survivor Walk alongside our family and the many cancer survivors, who come together to take their journey one step at a time. This year she will be there in Spirit, like so many that have come before her and so many that will come after her, and we will continue working towards our mission of raising awareness, encouraging hope, and offering healing through our collective presence.

In closing, Mom passed away March 24th this year. She did not lose the battle; she defied the odds and lived each day to her best ability. After all, this is what living with cancer is about. Not letting a disease prevent you from life; she beat-up Cancer. The mission of the Center will forever be intact through her legacy and our commitment to help anyone impacted by Cancer travel their journey as gently as possible. We will continue to be a beacon of light in the thickness of the fog.

Thank you,

Mary Dempsey

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