

Charitable work benefits Integrative Medicine

PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM ONE MAN'S PAINFUL LOSS



Lisa Turner with her children about a year before her 2007 death, which spurred Kirk Turner to raise money on behalf of The Center for Integrative Medicine.

“This was a lady like my wife,” Turner remarks. “But for lack of \$100, she was effectively denied hope.”

Kirk Turner still vividly remembers the seemingly random incident that led to a profound change in his life. The effects are rippling to this day for him and for patients at University of Colorado Hospital.

The surroundings were unremarkable that September day in 2007: the waiting room at The Center for Integrative Medicine (TCFIM) clinic on the fifth floor of the Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion. Turner was at the clinic with his wife Lisa, 42, who was then suffering through the late stages of the breast cancer that would take her life by the end of the year.

The Turners had come to the University of Colorado Cancer Center for treatment with

Virginia Borges, MD, after getting a referral from Lisa’s physician in Atlanta. As much as Lisa liked the care Borges provided, however, the chemotherapy and radiation treatments left her physically exhausted and emotionally spent, Turner says.

But Borges referred Lisa to TCFIM, where she found unexpected rejuvenation with the acupuncture, herbal therapy and massage treatments she received. The services, used by a growing number of cancer patients for relief of symptoms such as nausea, Turner recalls, were “invaluable. They gave her a sense of hope and peace.”

A life-changing encounter. While he waited for Lisa to complete her appointment that day, Turner noticed a woman approach the front desk and ask the care team assistant (CTA) about getting treatment. He overheard the CTA patiently explain that the fund TCFIM drew on to provide care for cancer patients who couldn’t afford it – insurance rarely covers the clinic’s services – was out of money.

“This was a lady like my wife,” Turner remarks. “But for lack of \$100, she was effectively denied hope.” While he didn’t act on his immediate impulse –

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“All things work together for the good.... But I didn’t want to just say it,” he explains. “I wanted to be a part of it.”

“I thought I should man up and say, ‘Here’s my credit card. Pay for it.’” – the incident, he says, “made an indelible impression on me.”

The powerful effects of those few minutes continue to resonate. After Lisa died in December 2007, Turner dedicated himself to raising money to pay for treatments for cancer patients at TCFIM, first on behalf of the Lisa Turner Fund – which later morphed into the LET’s Hope Foundation – and then through a new benefit event called “Frosted” that debuted late last year. His work has produced tens of thousands of dollars for patient care.



Turner (right) with chef Richard Sandoval at last December’s “Frosted” event.

Ideas into action. Turning his ideas into action is what consumes a good portion of Turner’s time these days. He continues to expand his fundraising efforts on behalf of TCFIM with his own LET’s Hope Foundation – he’s pursuing tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status – and a variety of other planned activities.

“I’m a business owner,” he says. “I motivate, present, convince and

organize.” But he draws his true inspiration, he adds, from Romans 8:28 in the New Testament: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.”*

He thought of the words, he says, as he planned Lisa’s funeral and eulogy. During her illness he had come to believe that “all things work together for the good.... But I didn’t want to just say it,” he explains. “I wanted to be a part of it.”

Unexpected opportunity. The creation of “Frosted,” a benefit dinner that drew several sponsors last December, was nearly as serendipitous as the arrival of the patient in that waiting room three years ago.

After raising money for TCFIM on his own in 2008, Turner says he realized he needed to take his fundraising “to a more formal level.” He was still searching for a plan when his longtime business ally and friend Bart DeLorenzo, a business developer working with restaurateur Richard Sandoval, contacted him. Sandoval, DeLorenzo said, wanted to put on a charity event but wasn’t sure where he wanted the dollars to go.

Turner told DeLorenzo, in effect, his search for a charity was over and explained to him the care TCFIM provides for cancer patients.

In mere weeks, Turner and TCFIM Practice Manager Ben Meyerhoff put together the event, held December 9, 2009 at one of Sandoval’s restaurants, La Sandia Mexican Kitchen in Park Meadows. Sponsors included UCH, Patron

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Turner speaks at "Frosted" event.

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Tequila, Shortline Automotive Group, Tommy Bahama, as well as Turner’s company, Original Power, Inc., and a Web site he created, We the Hopeful (*Insider*, November 25, 2009).

The hastily-put-together event raised \$23,000 for TCFIM patients, says Meyerhoff, who expects the amount to increase with additional time for planning.

“It has lots of upward potential,” he says. “It’s clear we can do it again next year.”

Giving hope. Turner says his aspiration is to raise \$100,000 in net funds from the LET’s Hope Foundation’s sponsoring of events like “Frosted.” “The simple goal is to have an entire year at The Center for Integrated Medicine where no one in need is turned away for financial reasons,” he says. “That would be worth celebrating.”

Meyerhoff is grateful to Turner, not simply for the money he has helped to raise on behalf of TCFIM, but also for helping to draw attention to the relief complementary and alternative medicine can bring to cancer patients like Lisa.

“The chemo and radiation done on her behalf didn’t work in the long run,” Meyerhoff says. “She would come back strong, but her prognosis progressively worsened. The only place she came away feeling positive about her life and her immediate future, and the potential of caregivers to do her good, was The Center for Integrative Medicine.”

Turner says he continues to draw strength from his charitable work. “Rather than

just inventing a widget,” he concludes, “which is something that helps other people, this helps me too.”

Post-script: The words on a plaque in the Center for Integrated Medicine waiting area dedicated to Lisa’s memory recalls the Biblical verse that provides Kirk Turner with inspiration: “In Loving Memory of Lisa Elaine Wakefield Turner Who Found Hope Here - All things Work Together for the Good.”