Gothenburg native uses edgy campaign to attack lung cancer's lack of funding.

Even as a child growing up in Gothenburg, Jennifer (Stauss) Windrum always knew there would be some cause, something big she was supposed to tackle in her lifetime.

Over the years, ideas came along.

"I thought, 'Well, maybe it's divorce.' Nope. 'Well, maybe it's depression. It runs in my family and I have battled it.' Nope."

The minute Windrum's mother, Leslie Lehrman, told her daughter she had been diagnosed with lung cancer, the Omaha public relations specialist realized her cause.

"I knew immediately what I was supposed to focus my attention on."

Windrum made a promise to her mother that she would make it her mission to make a difference, to crusade for the need for early detection of lung cancer, better screenings, more research, more money, more attention.

Lehrman, a former Gothenburg hairdresser who now lives in Arizona, first learned of her lung cancer in 2005 through a CT scan during a follow-up doctor visit after fighting uterine cancer.

"No more uterine cancer, but now lung cancer," Windrum said. "My mom has never smoked."

Lehrman has Stage IV non-small cell lung cancer. It has metastasized to the lymph nodes in her neck. It is inoperable and incurable.

She has undergone a wedge resection, lobectomy, countless biopsies and chemotherapy and radiation treatments. She will continue chemo and/or radiation, Windrum said, as long as her body can handle it and as long as she responds to the treatments.

Windrum said doctors believe second-hand smoke may be the cause or at least part of it.

“There is no definite answer.”

Research shows that radon, asbestos and other environmental factors can also cause lung cancer, as well genetics to some extent, Windrum said. “But really, it remains a mystery to researchers.”

Through study of her mother’s disease, Windrum has learned many startling facts.

“Lung cancer is the No. 1 cancer killer and the least funded,” she said. “At least 60% of new lung cancer cases are people who have never smoked or former smokers who quit decades ago.”

Windrum has realized that to raise awareness and funding for lung cancer, she must get rid of the stigma associated with the disease, that people who smoke bring the disease upon themselves.

“No one deserves lung cancer,” she said. “And lung cancer is no longer a smoker’s disease.”

Learning that the five-year survival rate for lung cancer is 15.5% and it hasn’t changed since 1971 outraged Windrum.

“I am out to change all of this.”

On Nov. 1, Windrum began waging a high-tech attack on lung cancer, namely the lack of funding for research.

As a former reporter and now public relations and social media practitioner, Windrum is combining all of her skills and talents to help rally those impacted by lung cancer, tell their stories and get lung cancer on the radar for more funding.

She has created a social media campaign called “WTF —Where’s the Funding for Lung Cancer?”

“I wanted to do something very catchy, edgy and simple,” she said. “In the digital world, a lot of people use WTF along with other acronyms, such as LOL, BTW, etc. I wanted to tap into that relevant language in some fashion.”

Lying in bed one night thinking through all of the many social media acronyms, it hit her: “The double entendre of WTF in today’s digital language and WTF for ‘Where’s the Funding?’ Edgy, bold and simple.”

For anyone who doesn’t know the digital WTF, the messaging still works.

“For those who get both meanings, it’s a double-punch,” Windrum said.

Just five days after launching her WTF campaign on Facebook, Windrum had more than 1,000 members. The group is more than 1,500 now.

And the campaign has attracted the attention of many lung cancer organizations and foundations. Several contacted her to see if she would partner with them.

“At that time, I was aiming to start my own foundation in my mom’s name,” she said. “After much education about of lung cancer foundations and funding, I changed my mind.”

Windrum found the perfect partner in the Bonnie J. Addario Lung Cancer Foundation. She has created a fund under that foundation in her mother’s name.

“I realized I didn’t want to run a foundation. I wanted to be the creative arm that brings in the dollars,” she said.

Windrum said her mother has been overwhelmed by the campaign in a good way.

“She says she is proud,” Windrum said. “I am proud of her for being willing to so publicly share her journey through all the ups and downs. We both know this is the only way people can truly understand what lung cancer is and what lung cancer is not.

Using Facebook, Twitter, Internet blogs and other social networks as well as television, radio and newspaper interviews, Windrum pushed lung cancer awareness and the disease’s need for additional funding to the forefront during November, National Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

On Monday, the last day of the month, Windrum encouraged everyone in the social network to post the same message directed toward the White House:

“Hey President Obama! WTF (Where’s the Funding) for Lung Cancer? You know the stats. No more excuses. No more stigma. We’re waiting for change.”

Pages and pages of the post showed up all over the Internet.

But just because Lung Cancer Awareness Month is over doesn’t mean Windrum’s effort has ended.

“I am a very passionate person,” Windrum said. “Combine that passion with some anger, stubbornness and journalism/PR/social media skills, I think I might just be able to make some noise. Thankfully, I already have but there is much, much more to come!”

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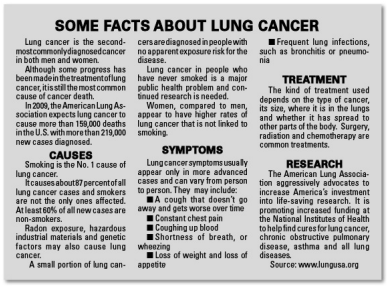

SOME FACTS ABOUT LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is the second-most commonly diagnosed cancer in both men and women.

Although some progress has been made in the treatment of lung cancer, it is still the most common cause of cancer death.

In 2009, the American Lung Association expects lung cancer to cause more than 159,000 deaths in the U.S. with more than 219,000 new cases diagnosed.

CAUSES

Smoking is the No. 1 cause of lung cancer.

It causes about 87 percent of all lung cancer cases and smokers are not the only ones affected. At least 60% of all new cases are non-smokers.

Radon exposure, hazardous industrial materials and genetic factors may also cause lung cancer.

A small portion of lung cancers are diagnosed in people with no apparent exposure risk for the disease.

Lung cancer in people who have never smoked is a major public health problem and continued research is needed.

Women, compared to men, appear to have higher rates of lung cancer that is not linked to smoking.

SYMPTOMS

Lung cancer symptoms usually appear only in more advanced cases and can vary from person to person. They may include:

- A cough that doesn’t go away and gets worse over time
- Constant chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Shortness of breath, or wheezing
- Loss of weight and loss of appetite
- Frequent lung infections, such as bronchitis or pneumonia

TREATMENT

The kind of treatment used depends on the type of cancer, its size, where it is in the lungs and whether it has spread to other parts of the body. Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy are common treatments.

RESEARCH

The American Lung Association aggressively advocates to increase America’s investment into life-saving research. It is promoting increased funding at the National Institutes of Health to help find cures for lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and all lung diseases.

Source: www.lungusa.org