

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY CANCER SCIENTISTS

The Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes (CRCFL) and Cornell University collaborate on an innovative program that connects doctoral students engaged in cancer research with individuals in the community personally affected by cancer. "Very few cancer researchers-in-training have an opportunity to get out of their laboratories and meet individuals directly affected by the disease they are studying. This project is designed to make that happen," says Bob Riter, Executive Director of CRCFL.

The program began in 2012 as a series of monthly seminars through which graduate students presented cancer research in lay language to Cancer Resource Center clients and to the general public. Recognized in 2013 with a Cornell "To-Go" (Town-Gown) Award, the program has expanded and become part of the academic curriculum through the Engaged Cornell Initiative.

In addition to the on-going seminars, the program integrates a few doctoral students into CRCFL's support groups on an on-going basis. They explain the science while learning about cancer from a very human perspective.

OUTCOMES

- "Talking to patients changed my perspective about how we should pursue research and with what goals."
- student
- "The need for our research programs to succeed [...] is so clear when you listen to stories about cancer patients' lives. As scientists, we are



working on very intricate pieces of the puzzle. It is easy to lose sight of the big

picture. The opportunity to really see the impact and the anxieties that the cancer patients face [...] is powerful motivation."

- student

The collaboration has been a great learning tool for students. Along with improving their communication skills, they have also shown increased inclusive and transformative learning, as well as social responsibilities.

However, the impact has been on both ends.



One cancer survivor said,

- "Each month I am continually fascinated and impressed. I feel I am much more knowledgeable about how the disease progresses and why, and the exciting breakthrough research being done right here in Ithaca."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The program developed in Ithaca is drawing national attention. It is our hope and expectation that it will soon be replicated in other communities.

