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Medicine Meets Music: Surgeons Form Unusual Rock Band

By Gillian Granoff

An eclectic group of exceptional surgeons specializing in the treatment, research and cure of gynecologic cancers has a new take on Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll. Dr. Nimesh P. Nagarsheth, M.D., an assistant professor in the Division of Gynecological Oncology at Mt. Sinai Hospital, NY, does not conform to the stereotypical characteristics one would expect from a nationally renowned and groundbreaking surgeon. At the end of the day, when most overworked doctors are coveting a few hours of sleep, these doctors moonlight as rock stars, and turn in their scalpels and scrubs for electric guitars, drums and synthesizers. In the gritty mix of alternative and original rock, N.E.D. (which stands for No Evidence of Disease), as they have coined themselves, belt the tunes that give a voice to the needs, struggles and triumphs of their patients as they struggle with the debilitating side effects of their disease. Often these crippling emotions define the daily lives of those with their disease.

Nimesh Nagarsheth, M.D., William E. Winter III, M.D., Rusty Robinson, M.D., John F. Boggess, M.D., John Soper, M.D., and Joanie Hope, M.D., combine their musical and medical expertise as more than simply an outlet for their own pressures and frustrations. They see their music as a vehicle to raise awareness to the prevalence and the crucial need for research and funding for ovarian cancer and other gynecological diseases. Their goal is to use music to empower both patients and doctors. The lyrics of their songs give voice to the need for doctors to overcome their fear of creating closer bonds with their patients.

Nagarsheth's roots in music go back to his college days. As a student at the University of Wisconsin, Nagarsheth focused his studies in musical percussion, but refocused his concentration on medicine in search of a pragmatic vocation. "I saw many really talented peers who worked really hard and were not getting jobs as musicians."

His decision to refocus his studies on medicine led him to the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and onto a fellowship at Duke University, where he chose to specialize in gynecologic oncology (GO). The choice was a good fit for Nimesh: it allowed him to channel his interest in women's health care into an area where he could actually help people. His choice was reinforced, he says, by the continuity of the patient-doctor relationship. In GO doctors see the same patients throughout the course of their illness from diagnosis to treatment. The continuity of this treatment "allows us to build closer relationships with our patients and, ultimately, is better for patient morale and treatment." This aspect ensures a better quality of treatment for the patient and allows doctors to build stronger bonds with their patients.

Nagarsheth put his plans for a music career on the back burner until email solicitation requesting entertainment at an upcoming medical conference planted the seeds of the idea to create a band.

In the spring of 2008, William Winter III, M.D., a cancer specialist at Northwest Cancer Specialists in Portland Oregon, Rusty Robinson, M.D., a professor and Director of Clinical Research at Harrington Cancer Center in Texas, John F. Boggess, M.D., an associate Professor in Gynecologic Oncology at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, John Soper, M.D., a Professor at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Joanie Hope, M.D., a gynecology oncology fellow at NYU Medical Center, met, rehearsed and entertained an eager audience at a conference in Tampa, Florida. The positive feedback N.E.D. received planted seeds for the idea to create a band, devoted entirely to raising awareness and funds for the research, cure, and education of gynecologic cancers.

Now this extraordinary band has teamed up with Motema Music to record and promote a CD set to release in November 2009. The record release will coincide with the first annual Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Movement in Washington, D.C. They now find themselves working side by side with writing coach and producer Mario McNulty whose credits include the likes of David Bowie, Linkin Park, and Ziggy Marley.

The release of their first album this fall is set to promote the first of its kind awareness movement for Gynecologic Cancers in November 2009. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the album will go toward research and education on the disease.

Nagarsheth compares the teamwork required to create a band as analogous to that of a surgical team. "Each requires the participation of every member to make it a success." Nagarsheth certainly understands and respects the magic of this collaboration, and waxes poetic about the band's first recording session. "It was magical."

The group of surgeons has transferred its medical skills into a symphony of sound that gives voice to the needs and struggles of patients surviving the physically and emotionally draining struggles in the daily life of a cancer survivor.

The lyrics of the music illustrate the complex emotions these doctors see in their patients. "For too many years I lived with this silence, afraid to embrace a life ending in violence, But now I can hear her singing."

Their music is testament to the healing and restorative power of music and art's ability to, as Nagarsheth says, "lift the human spirit." Nagarsheth holds no illusions about the power of music to cure cancer. For him, the connection between music and medicine is personal, but in the field of traditional medicine, he states music is "a tough sell. We know our music will not cure the disease, but we do hope our music can improve the quality of life of our patients." Indeed statistics have documented the health benefits of music on relieving patients' pain, depression and anxiety and elevating mood.

These five outstanding physicians combine their unique musical talents into a symphony of sound that resonates beyond the walls of the studios they record in. Their lyrics, “Without melody, sadness can fill even the brightest among us.... I will live without fear and doubt” ring true.

Their hope is to inspire people to become actively involved in the education and fight against gynecologic cancers.

Nagarsheth summarized his ambition for the group with this clear message: “Keep listening to music and keep fighting the good fight against cancer.”

For more information on N.E.D. go to Motema.com or www.thegcf.org. Learn more about how to help and make a donation in the fight against gynecological cancers.