

Kevin Harrang Story for EvergreenHealth *Monitor*

### **Kevin Harrang: Learning to Live with Cancer**

When Kevin Harrang of Kirkland got his diagnosis two years ago of multiple myeloma – an incurable blood cancer – he was at the top of his many games: successful corporate attorney at Microsoft, entrepreneur with a legal technology start-up company, volunteer at a local legal assistance program, avid tennis player, kayaker, bicyclist and all-around sportsman in a sports-loving family. As he puts it, “If you can buy something at REI for it, then we do it.”

With the cancer came the need, first, to see himself in a new way. “It took a lot of reorientation to get from an image of myself as a granola-eating, Gortex-wearing, Northwest outdoors person to cancer patient.” Then came the need to see himself as living his life with cancer, managing it, not beating it. In making that journey, he was helped by his team of physicians from EvergreenHealth and the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA), especially Dr. Tim Carlos at EvergreenHealth and Dr. Pam Becker of SCCA.

With the diagnosis, Kevin says, “My outlook as a healthy person had really come crashing down, and so then what I needed to do was understand what was going on, what the possible treatments were for this. And then you have to do this reorientation: how much of my former life can I incorporate into my future life with this treatment and new health issues?”

In Kevin’s case, the treatment options included intense chemotherapy, radiation therapy, two rounds of stem cell transplantations (the first using his own stem cells and the second using stem cells from his brother) and maintenance chemotherapy using a new drug in a clinical trial. And, as if all of that wasn’t enough, Kevin had open-heart surgery to treat an infection affecting a heart valve that had to be repaired.

The treatment was aggressive in part because the cancer was aggressive and in part because Kevin was a relatively young patient for his kind of cancer. “If you’re 85 years old, stem cell transplant is not really an option. But Kevin was 51, so we tend to be aggressive,” explains Dr. Carlos.

The goal with relatively young patients like Kevin, according to Dr. Becker, is “to prolong survival and progression free survival. For a young person at his age and excellent physical condition, we would be interested in trying to do everything we could to lengthen his time with good health and with survival.”

Getting to good health again, though, could be “brutal,” says Kevin, “especially to begin with when I was pretty laid low and going through the first part of the treatment. For example, I couldn’t play tennis, and I was a big tennis player.” Kevin’s solution to being laid low was to find “the essence of things that I used to be able to do and then find other avenues for doing that going forward.” When he couldn’t play tennis, Kevin found a professional coach and learned to play competitive table tennis. “I’d go over and play with the Chinese players, which was really fun. These nine-year-old kids would totally kill me.”

Throughout the worst periods of his treatment, when he was in intensive care, Kevin would find what for him was the essence of what he enjoyed. “It’s super hard if you’re in intensive care in a hospital and

you're nauseous and, you know, feeling worse than you could ever imagine. But it turns out there's an exercise bicycle down the hall, and you can do 20 minutes on that."

Today, Kevin has pretty much returned to the life he had before cancer. He is back to work assisting clients at a pro bono legal clinic, serving on a non-profit board, traveling – and playing tennis again. He calls it "a complete miracle. The kind of cancer I have is the kind of thing that they can knock down but have a difficult time eliminating, so it's all about living with it. This metaphor that you're going to fight it and you're going to beat it is not really applicable because, in the long run, none of us beat it."

In learning to live with his cancer, Kevin says he had "to reassess what's important. I found the support of family and friends to be the single most sustaining thing, and also being able to be really present in the moment – as they say in yoga class. One of my personal rules for living has always been 'find joy in every day.' Even through the darkest days of treatment, I found this to be more imperative than ever."

Remaining close to the support of family and friends is one reason Kevin chose EvergreenHealth and SCCA for his cancer care. "We live in Kirkland. We had been patients at Evergreen -- for instance, my daughter had her appendix taken out there -- and we would go there. It seemed like a super professional place close by, and it was a good choice," says Kevin.

As for choosing SCCA for what he calls the "industrial-strength chemotherapy followed by stem cell transplant," Kevin says, "I was in a position that I could really have gotten treatment anywhere. I spent some time looking around at the other centers in the world. If there was someplace better, then I could have done that. In the end, I concluded that the local treatment options were world-class. But even if I thought that some other place was a little better, the difference of being away from home and my support network trumped that. And that has made all the difference."

Part of the network that sustained him turned out to be his doctors. Dr. Carlos, for instance, "has been a good friend and colleague as well as my treating physician." And for Dr. Becker, one of the privileges of caring for patients like Kevin is feeling almost "like I'm a family member with them. I'm able to see how much patients' families support them. I get to see the best of people giving to each other."

"Today I'm back in the game," says Kevin, with evident joy.

Sidebar

### **EvergreenHealth and SCCA: Partners in Delivering Cancer Care at Halvorson**

The already close relationship between EvergreenHealth's cancer program and SCCA became even closer this past fall with the opening of the Halvorson Cancer Center at the EvergreenHealth Medical Center. There, the two programs are working as partners to collaboratively provide patients with seamless cancer care, and with greater access to clinical trials, in an environment where everyone is focused on them.

The partnership, says Robert Malte, CEO of EvergreenHealth, “brings together the innovative expertise and research of SCCA and the expertise, compassionate care and commitment to breakthrough care of EvergreenHealth to provide national quality cancer care on the Eastside.”

Norm Hubbard, CEO of SCCA, adds that “this is a partnership of two very reputable cancer programs that offers patients their best hope for survival, in part because patients will have more access to cancer clinical trials, if they want that.”

The fundamental intent of the partnership is to bring the highest quality and most cost-effective solutions to cancer care on the Eastside.

To learn more about the partnership and cancer care at Halvorson, visit [INSERT URL](#), or call [XXX XXX XXXX](#).