

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



The night before the big ride, the rain came down in torrents. The streets were flooded but our spirits were not dampened: we knew we would be safe and dry when it mattered.

Sunday, September 22, was the 7th Annual Lymphoma Research Ride for the Lymphoma Research Foundation. Earlier in the week, the weather report had said there was a 40% chance of rain that day, with thunderstorms starting on Saturday and continuing until Monday. This threat mobilized the forces. My mother-in-law said a rosary, and my nonpracticing Catholic wife Christine stood a small statue of St. Joseph in the bedroom window. Despite being Jewish, I accepted whatever help we could get. Before we knew it, the risk of rain had dropped to 30% and then 10%, until finally the forecast merely called for a few scattered clouds. Sure enough, it poured the night before the ride, but the roads dried up overnight and ride day was glorious.

The sun shone on the 330 riders—some competitive, others casual—who ranged in age from 11 to 81 years. Hundreds of volunteers, family members, and friends also turned out for the event. There were so many stories. For example, 1 patient with a history of lymphoblastic lymphoma had missed the first ride after his diagnosis because he was just completing chemotherapy. He rode in the next 2 events, but missed the following one because he was getting married that day. His wife was pregnant when he rode last year, and this year 2 of his biggest fans were his wife and his 9-month-old daughter.

One of my new patients, who had recently enrolled in a clinical trial, had not ridden a bicycle in years and needed to rent one. Despite this, she finished 25 miles with pride (it did not hurt that she was in the Navy and quite fit). Another participant had undergone an allogeneic stem cell transplant 9 months earlier, and took part because of how much this ride meant to him and his family. One rider was an Orthodox Jewish woman who completed the ride wearing a long dress and a head covering. She had seen our poster hanging on the bulletin board in an REI store, and joined us because her sister had died of lymphoma.

A sense of enthusiasm and joy was everywhere. Patients felt empowered that they were doing something to actively fight their disease, taking control of what they could not control.

Before the peleton left the Barnesville School parking lot that served as our starting point, a few introductory comments were made. These included some words from a television announcer for WJLA, our media sponsor; from a police officer regarding safety (we had volunteers at every right turn, and a police officer at every left and busy intersection); from Liz Thompson, the new Chief Executive Officer of the Lymphoma Research Foundation; and from a representative from the office of Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), who presented me with a Congressional Commendation for work toward the cure of cancer. Indeed, in 2 weeks my wife and I will be honored by the Lymphoma Research Foundation with their Partners in Hope Distinguished Leadership Award.

I am not the one who deserves these accolades, however. They should go to the members of our ride committee, who over the years have become a little family. I especially want to recognize Lisa and Gary, who do more to make the ride a success than I can describe in this letter. Lisa runs all the volunteer activities, including organizing the road marshalls, and Gary is our unsung hero who does the heavy lifting, including riding out early in the morning to hammer in the road signs and riding the 50-mile route as a road marshall. I am also grateful to Alex, who is one of the patients of mine who inspired the ride in the first place; to Sondra, Vanita, Dana, Judith, Valerie, and Jeff; and to Robin, our ride planner, who is indefatigable in her efforts to ensure that everything runs smoothly. My deepest gratitude goes to my wife, whose idea to give something back to the world inspired the idea to have a ride in the first place, and who has devoted her heart and soul to this event.

Most of all, however, the awards should go to the patients whose lives have been disrupted by a dreadful diagnosis. They show up for this event; they ride 25, 39, or 50 miles; and they encourage donations—almost \$3 million since we began. Most of all, they inspire us and remind us why we do what we do.

Until next month ...

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD