

In Memory of Robert L. Comis, MD



I recently attended the Spring ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group meeting. One evening I was able to spend some time at the bar with Group co-chair Bob Comis, one of my all-time favorite colleagues. In 2009, Bob asked me to become chair of the ECOG lymphoma committee. I am not sure what he saw in me back then, but I will always be grateful for his willingness to take a chance on a young (I was only 42 at the time) and unproven investigator. Over the years, his support was unwavering. At our group meeting, Bob was in great spirits—feisty and funny. Five days later, we learned of his death with this announcement from ECOG-ACRIN:

Philadelphia, Pa., May 11, 2017—It is with great sadness that the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group (ECOG-ACRIN) announces the passing of its beloved Group Co-Chair, Robert L. Comis, MD. Shortly after a successful scientific meeting held last week by the Group in Washington, DC, Dr. Comis succumbed to a sudden illness at home. His loss to ECOG-ACRIN, his family, friends, colleagues, fellow researchers, advocates, and patients is immeasurable.

A giant in national and international clinical research since 1977, Dr. Comis is known as a champion of patient access to cancer clinical trials. He led the Group from 1995 and in that time, he spearheaded scores of scientific discoveries to alleviate the burden of cancer. Through clinical trials designed and conducted by the Group, his leadership changed clinical practice across multiple types of cancer.

He will always be remembered for his many initiatives to raise awareness about the pivotal role of cancer clinical trials in prevention, detection and treatment. The establishment of the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group in 2012 is one of his proudest scientific achievements for the Group's bold integration of therapeutic and medical imaging research with the latest bioinformatics technologies into a single scientific organization.

"Bob showed remarkable vision in working as a partner to bring us together to form the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group," said Group Co-Chair Mitchell D. Schnall, MD, PhD, University of Pennsylvania.

Most recently, Dr. Comis cemented the Group's capabilities in precision medicine by working closely with the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to lead the design and implementation of the NCI-MATCH (EAY131) trial. NCI-MATCH is the largest, most scientifically rigorous precision medicine cancer trial to date.

"Dr. Comis' vision and drive allowed us to develop and manage a complex trial in a little over a year, and to complete enrollment of 6000 patients for screening in another

15 months," remarked Group Co-Chair Elect Peter J. O'Dwyer, MD, University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Comis had been a member of boards and committees for many prestigious academic organizations, including the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and C-Change, the American Radium Society, National Coalition for Cancer Research, and others. He served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, *Cancer Research*, and *Clinical Cancer Research*; authored more than 140 scientific articles; and contributed to more than 20 scientific and medical textbooks on cancer. His leadership in clinical research continued through frequent appearances as a subject matter expert to the United States Congress, Institute of Medicine, President's Cancer Panel, National Cancer Advisory Board, and many other national and international organizations.

A graduate of Fordham University, Dr. Comis received his medical degree from State University of New York Health Science Center School of Medicine, where he also completed his medical internship and residency. He served as a staff associate at the National Cancer Institute and completed a medical oncology fellowship at The Sidney Farber Cancer Center at Harvard Medical School. He held various clinical practice and research leadership positions at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Temple University School of Medicine, Fox Chase Cancer Center, and Allegheny Cancer Center. Dr. Comis was a diplomate of the American Board of Internal Medicine and a member of the American College of Physicians–American Society of Internal Medicine. ...

He is survived by his wife, five children and four grandchildren.

We had a two-day retreat prior to the group meeting that focused on the grant renewal due seven months from now. At the end of the retreat, Bob's parting words to us were "good luck!" We all laughed, as we knew he would not be doing the writing this time. He was retiring as our Group co-chair this year.

I am sad that Bob did not get to enjoy retirement, but I feel that he finished "on top." He is someone who unequivocally made a difference in this world.

Until next month ...

Brad S. Kahl, MD