

MEDONCMD

Oncology Review

October 2023

**Breast
Cancer
Awareness
Month**

**THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF RINGING THE
BELL INTO CANCER
REMISSION**

MENTAL HEALTH

**UNDERSTANDING
INPATIENT MEDICAL
ONCOLOGY**

**MICROBIOTA
TRANSPLANTATION
AND CANCER
IMMUNOTHERAPY**

HOT OFF THE PRESS



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MEET THE AUTHORS



Dr. Sajeve Thomas

Dr. Sajeve Thomas is a board-certified medical oncologist and internal medicine specialist at the Orlando Health Cancer Institute.

With over a decade of experience, he focuses on treating melanoma, sarcoma, and gastrointestinal conditions. As one of the principal investigators at his cancer center, he leads various clinical trials, exploring innovative therapies such as targeted therapy, immunotherapy, intratumoral therapy, and complex cellular therapies.



Dr. Daniel Landau

Dr. Daniel Landau, a distinguished board-certified hematologist/oncologist with extensive experience at the Orlando Health Cancer Institute and the Medical University of South Carolina, is a leader in the fields of genitourinary oncology and hematology.

His notable contributions extend to advanced technology integration in oncology as the Director of Telemedicine Services, enhancing the patient experience through innovative system designs. Additionally,



LETTER FROM OUR **AUTHOR**

Welcome to MedOncMD, where we provide the latest and most essential information for cancer patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers. We aim to bridge the gap between what your oncologist may not have had time to tell you.

With over 12 years of experience in medical oncology, I've witnessed the challenges patients and their families face when dealing with cancer. Through MedOncMD, we empower you with knowledge to navigate this complex world of cancer care.

In each MedOncMD issue, you can expect easily understandable articles presenting the latest data from oncology conferences and reputable peer-reviewed journals. We also provide insights into the daily challenges and triumphs from a practicing medical oncologist's perspective.

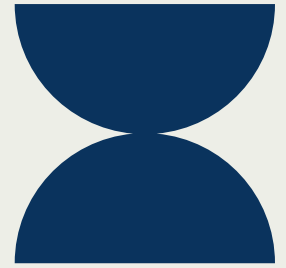
Our mission is to empower you with knowledge, whether you're a patient, caregiver, or healthcare provider.

We cover topics such as immunotherapy advancements, personalized medicine, survivorship care, and the importance of mental health support during cancer treatment. Join us on this journey as we navigate the ever-evolving oncology landscape together, offering reliable information and inspiring stories that bring hope and resilience.

At MedOncMD, we're passionate about making a difference in the lives of cancer patients and their families. We look forward to being your partner in the fight against cancer.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sajeve Thomas



**Let MedOncMD
be your trusted
source for
reliable
information and
empowering
stories that
inspire hope and
resilience**



IN THIS ISSUE

We continue our mission to empower and inform our readers in their cancer journey. Our initiative was born with the goal of providing the latest research breakthroughs in oncology treatments, and in this issue, we bring you up-to-date information on cutting-edge therapies and approaches. We also aim to be a central hub for essential resources, helping you make informed decisions about your treatment options.

Additionally, we share highlights from our recent activities and events over the past month, keeping you in the loop about the most important developments in our work.

MedOncMD Magazine remains committed to being a valuable, free resource that serves our community, centralizing the most critical information and support you need on your path to defeating cancer.

Enjoy it!



THIS PHOTOGRAPH REPRESENTS THE MISSION WE HAVE IN MEDONCMD, KNOWLEDGE, UNION AND HOPE CROSSING TOGETHER THE CANCER JOURNEY.



RESEARCH AND DEDICATION DURING THE CREATION OF THIS RESOURCE

Echoes of Victory

The Significance of
Ringing the Bell into
Cancer Remission

By Dr Sajeve Thomas

Ring this bell...
three times well...
its toll to clearly say...
my treatment is done...
this course is run...
and I am on my way!





Representative image

Embarking on the tumultuous journey that is stage IV melanoma, both patients and healthcare providers often find themselves in an intricate dance of vulnerability, resilience, and human connection.

In the realm of cancer care, a unique bond forms between patients, their families, and healthcare providers. The journey is emotionally charged, marked by shared sorrow in setbacks and collective joy in victories.

With a long day of seeing patients in clinic, administrative and teaching responsibilities, It is often difficult to stop and reflect on these moments.

His story, with its ups and downs, serves as a poignant reminder of the emotional journey healthcare providers undertake, seeking solace in successes and strength in challenging times. Such moments are pinnacle experiences for oncology healthcare providers, filled with mixed emotions of joy and nostalgia.



Learn more here:

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SPECIAL Breast Cancer Awareness month

Understanding Breast Cancer Risk Factors: What You Need to Know

Breast cancer, a formidable adversary, affects millions of lives worldwide each year. In our quest to combat this disease, knowledge is the most potent weapon we have. Breast Cancer Awareness Month is the ideal time to explore the intricacies of breast cancer risk factors, from the genetic underpinnings to lifestyle choices that can influence your risk.

Learn more here:

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Genetic Red Flags

One of the most well-known genetic risk factors for breast cancer is the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations. According to a [study published in the journal Nature](#), individuals with these mutations have a significantly higher risk of developing breast cancer compared to the general population.

Your family tree matters. Having a first-degree relative (mother, sister, or daughter) with breast cancer increases your risk. In fact, a family history of breast cancer can double or triple your risk, as noted in the American Cancer Society guidelines.

Hormonal Red Flags

Starting your period before age 12 or experiencing menopause after age 55 can increase your breast cancer risk. The longer your body is exposed to estrogen, the greater the risk, as detailed in an [article in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute](#)

Lifestyle Factors

Your lifestyle choices can also play a significant role. Maintaining a healthy weight through a balanced diet and regular physical activity can reduce your risk.

Limiting alcohol consumption and avoiding smoking are crucial steps in reducing breast cancer risk. The National Cancer Institute states that alcohol can increase estrogen levels in the body, potentially fueling breast cancer growth

Empowerment through Knowledge

Understanding breast cancer risk factors empowers you to take control of your health. Regular screenings, self-exams, and open communication with your healthcare provider are key

Screening Guidelines

Regular breast cancer screenings are essential because they can detect abnormalities long before symptoms appear. Early detection significantly increases the chances of successful treatment and improves survival rates. By identifying breast cancer at an early stage, medical professionals can provide timely interventions that may include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or targeted therapies.

Mammograms – Your Shield Against Breast Cancer

Mammography is considered the gold standard for breast cancer screening.

It involves taking X-ray images (mammograms) of the breasts to identify any suspicious areas or masses that may indicate early-stage breast cancer. Mammograms are recommended for women starting from the age of 40 or earlier based on individual risk factors.

When to Start

The age at which women should begin regular mammograms can vary. However, many healthcare organizations, including the American Cancer Society, recommend starting annual mammograms at age . For those with a higher risk due to family history or other factors, screening may begin earlier.

Frequency Matters

Annual mammograms are the gold standard for early detection. Regular screenings increase the likelihood of identifying breast cancer in its early, more treatable stages. Remember, the goal is not just to find cancer; it's to find it when it's most manageable.

Breast cancer screenings are not just medical appointments; they are life-saving opportunities. By following age-appropriate guidelines and incorporating regular self-exams into your routine, you take an active role in your breast health.



Early detection is the key to surviving breast cancer. Regular screenings are our most effective tools in this fight.



Learn more here:

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Breast Cancer and Mental health

Navigating the
Emotional Journey

By Dr Sajeve Thomas



The Emotional Impact of a Breast Cancer Diagnosis

A breast cancer diagnosis can elicit an array of emotions ranging from shock, fear, anger, sadness, and uncertainty. It is important to recognize and validate these feelings, as they are natural responses to such overwhelming news.

According to Dr. Susan Love's book "Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book," patients may experience a rollercoaster of emotions as they navigate through their diagnosis and treatment process (Love, 2015)

It's entirely natural to feel overwhelmed by the prospect of treatments, side effects, and the unknown path ahead. As one patient aptly put it, "It's like being thrust into a storm without a compass."

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression are frequent companions on the breast cancer journey. The constant worry about the future, the impact on loved ones, and the fear of recurrence can take a toll on mental health. These emotions are not a sign of weakness but a response to a challenging situation.

Coping Strategies

One of the most effective coping strategies is seeking support. Share your feelings with loved ones, join a support group, or consider counseling. Talking about your emotions can provide relief and create a sense of community.

Join our compassionate community on Facebook "Cancer awareness and support" we believe in the power of unity and shared knowledge. Here, we come together to exchange experiences, ask questions, and extend unwavering support to one another throughout the cancer journey.

Make self-care a priority. Engage in activities that bring you joy and relaxation, whether it's reading, painting, yoga, or simply taking a long bath. Self-care nurtures your mental and emotional health.

Mindfulness and meditation techniques can help you stay grounded and reduce anxiety. They teach you to focus on the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

Learn more here:

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Mental Health Awareness

By Dr. Daniel Landau



I want to extend a special shoutout to our mental health professionals.

In the field of oncology, we recognize the importance of mental health. The diagnosis of cancer is often a shocking and emotionally challenging experience. It can have a profound impact on individuals, both mentally and physically. As physicians, we often focus on the physical battle: shrinking the cancer, achieving remission, and controlling the disease. However, there is another battle that can be equally as important – the battle for mental health.

I have conveyed to patients that winning the physical battle is only half of our goal. While we strive to control the cancer, our objective goes beyond treating the disease; we aim to treat the person and offer them the best chance at living the life they want to live. Maintaining mental health is a significant aspect of this journey.

Sometimes, I also advise patients that if they don't address their emotions and prioritize their mental health, they may never fully recover from the disease. Neglecting mental health issues, be it anxiety, depression, fear, anger, or stress, can exacerbate the other challenges patients are facing.

There are several ways to address mental health concerns, and I recommend the following:

Working with therapists: Many therapists specialize in working with patients and families affected by a cancer diagnosis.

Using smartphone applications that focus on breathing, relaxation, yoga, and other relaxation techniques.

Engaging in open conversations with family and friends who know you well.

Journaling or finding other creative ways to express your feelings. Practicing relaxation techniques.

If you are feeling especially stressed or drained, please don't hesitate to speak with your physicians. There are often more resources available than people realize.

Learn more here:

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A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING Inpatient Medical Oncology

By Dr. Sajeve Thomas

I just spent a very busy month on the inpatient medical oncology service and thought I would share some insight about what medical oncologist see and do in-house.

1 PURPOSE OF CONSULTATION

Medical oncology is fortunately an outpatient field where most patients are managed and treated in the clinic by a **village** of healthcare providers. Unfortunately, if a patient is admitted with a known diagnosis of cancer, they often are coming in for severe symptoms due to their underlying cancer or significant toxicities of the treatment they were receiving outpatient



2 MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Inpatient care often involves multiple specialists working in tandem. The medical oncologist will collaborate with other physicians, nurses, and healthcare professionals to ensure holistic care. Prognosis, treatment options, sequence of therapies are discussed constantly depending on the status of the patient from a overall health and performance standpoint.





3 TREATMENT MODIFICATIONS

Hospitalizations might result in modifications to cancer treatments, such as delaying a chemotherapy session, continuation of oral therapies that patients were taking outpatient, or even complete discontinuation of all therapies with a plan for more best supportive care. This is done keeping the patient's best interests in mind.

4 COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Ensure that there's a clear channel of communication between the patient, family, and the medical team. Use this opportunity to ask questions, clarify doubts, and understand the treatment plan. Many times, patients are coming in for other medical issues completely unrelated to their cancer diagnosis. Infection, pneumonias, stones, gastrointestinal bleeds, etc.



5 UNDERSTANDING SIDE EFFECTS

Some treatments can have side effects that need hospital care. Be proactive in discussing potential side effects and the measures taken to manage them.

Learn more here:

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THE PROMISING INTERSECTION OF FECAL MICROBIOTA TRANSPLANTATION AND CANCER IMMUNOTHERAPY

By Dr Sajeve Thomas

An Emerging Frontier for Refractory Melanoma Treatment

This article is based on the interesting results published by [Routy et al. Nature July 2023](#). I am hoping that we will soon open a protocol using FMT in cancer patients, and I will announce once we're site activated at the Orlando Health Cancer Institute.

The revolutionary world of cancer treatment is once again on the brink of a potentially transformative breakthrough, this time at the unexpected crossroads where fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) meets immunotherapy.

This novel approach, which might seem more at home in a science fiction novel than in the annals of scientific literature, suggests that the contents of our gut could unlock new levels of efficacy in cancer treatment, particularly for patients with advanced melanoma that has proven resistant to current frontline defenses.

Think of the human body as a complex ecosystem or a bustling city, with the gut microbiota representing the diverse citizenry. Just like a thriving city relies on the harmony amongst its inhabitants, our bodies depend on the intricate balance within our gut microbiota.

Now, imagine if a city's population changed – if new residents brought innovative ideas, technologies, and strategies that made the city more prosperous and resilient. That's akin to what FMT proposes by introducing beneficial bacteria from a healthy individual's feces into a patient's gastrointestinal tract, potentially leading to profound systemic effects.

Recent studies have taken this concept into the realm of cancer treatment, specifically melanoma, a type of skin cancer notoriously difficult to treat in its advanced stages. Three groundbreaking clinical trials have shown not only the safety of combining FMT with anti-PD-1 immunotherapy (a treatment that unleashes the body's immune system to attack cancer cells) but also significant promise in efficacy.



One trial recently published in *Nature* demonstrated a striking 65% objective response rate in previously untreated patients when FMT was paired with frontline PD-1 inhibitors, a category of drugs that includes known names like nivolumab and pembrolizumab.

PD1 inhibitors as single agents typically only have a response rate of 30-40%. Another trial in patients with PD-1-refractory melanoma, whose disease had stopped responding to standard immunotherapy treatments, revealed that FMT could rekindle response to therapy, with a clinical benefit observed in 6 out of 15 patients.

Learn more here:

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The third study reinforced these findings, showing clinical responses in three out of ten patients treated with FMT and reinduction of anti-PD-1 immunotherapy.

But how does this work? Let's go back to our city analogy. Suppose a city is under siege (akin to cancer attacking the body), and its defense forces (the immune system) are struggling to fend off the invaders.

Now, imagine that the new residents (beneficial bacteria introduced through FMT) bring with them unique strategies that enhance the city's defenses, helping them outmaneuver the attackers.

In scientific terms, FMT appears to reshape the gut microbiome, leading to beneficial changes in the body's immune response and even the tumor's immediate surroundings, the so-called tumor microenvironment.

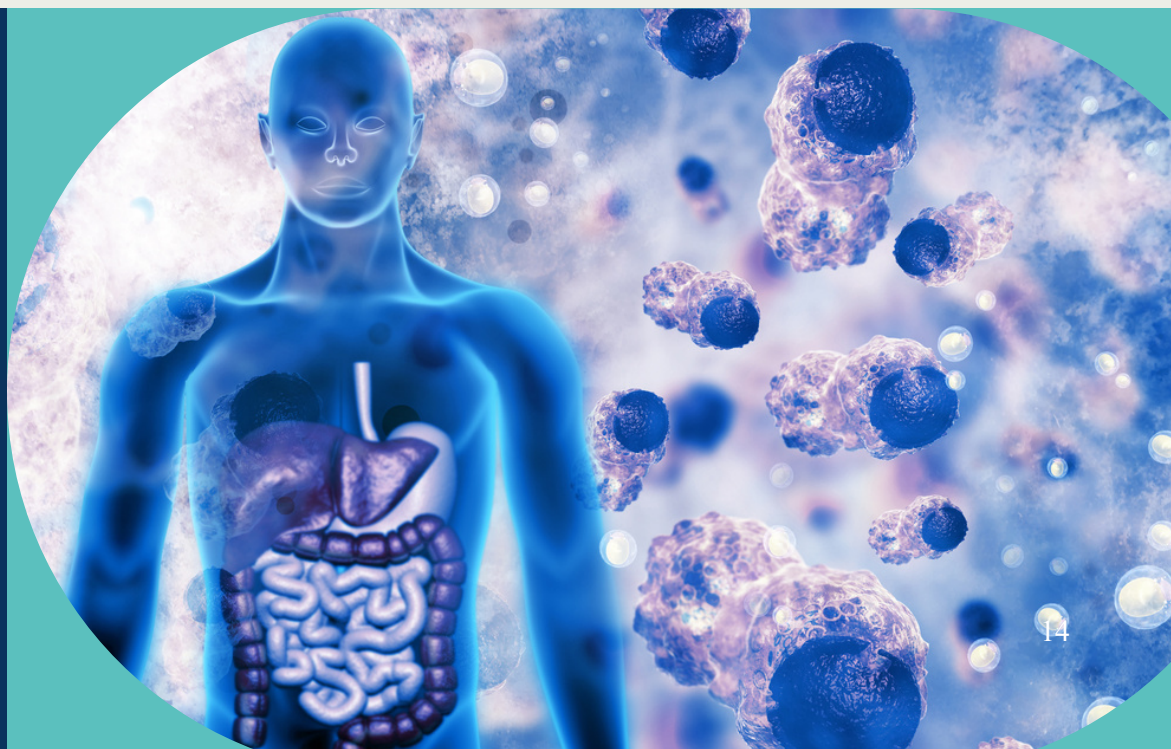
These trials noted that responders to the treatment tended to show an increase in certain beneficial bacteria, changes in immune cell activity, and a decrease in specific immune-suppressing cells. It's like the new residents in the city helping to coordinate better defenses and outsmarting the siege.

FMT isn't just influencing tumor responses to therapy but also showing promise in managing

immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICI)-associated colitis, a challenging side effect faced by many patients undergoing cancer immunotherapy.

This breakthrough comes with the caveat that the evidence is currently based on a limited number of cases. The initial findings suggest that by altering the gut's microbial landscape, FMT may provide rapid, significant relief for those suffering from this often debilitating condition despite multiple lines of immunosuppressive therapies.

Importantly, these studies are preliminary, and the sample sizes are relatively small. However, the implications are profound.



These findings suggest a future where oncologists might not only prescribe drugs but also specific microbial cocktails tailored to boost a patient's response to cancer therapy.

Hot Off The Press

By Dr. Daniel Landau



Shifting the Paradigm of Cancer Treatment

In previous posts on MedOncMD.com, I've discussed a message about a future where we rely less on traditional chemotherapy. **Dr. Thomas** and I have dedicated a significant portion of our careers to shifting the paradigm toward more targeted therapies that minimize damage to healthy cells. Our ultimate goal is to improve the quality and length of life for our patients while reducing the toxicity of treatments.

The EV-302/KEYNOTE-A39 Study: Comparing Targeted Therapies to Traditional Chemotherapy

Recently, the results of the EV-302/KEYNOTE-A39 study were presented at a global meeting. This study compared an Antibody Drug Conjugate and Immunotherapy (Padcev and Pembrolizumab) to traditional chemotherapy in patients with advanced urothelial (bladder cancer). Padcev targets cells with a marker called Nectin-4 on their surface, primarily found on cancer cells rather than healthy ones.

This means that the therapy mostly targets malignant cells while sparing healthy ones.

Pembrolizumab activates the body's normal immune cells to recognize cancer cells as it would a virus or bacteria and mount an attack.

The trial results demonstrate, for the first time, that a non-chemotherapy combination could surpass the effectiveness of standard chemotherapy, typically cisplatin and gemcitabine. Patients, on average, had better disease control and longer survival with

Padcev and Pembrolizumab compared to traditional chemotherapy.

Although it may take some time for a new treatment option to become the standard of care after study results are released, it's highly likely that this combination will quickly become the new standard.

Such advancements occur thanks to clinical trials and forward-thinking. Dr. Thomas and I aspire to bring about similar changes in the treatment of every disease we handle.

Learn more here:

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