

Cycling for a Cure

BY RICHARD HITE

Four years ago, I was in the prime of my life. Happily married and the father of three young children, I worked and played hard, running the business I owned and cycling and spending time with my family as often as I could. Then I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and was told that there was no known cure. For the first time, I feared the unknown.

I was pretty close to complete kidney failure upon my diagnosis. My treatment consisted of an intense treatment plan that incorporated chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant. It left me emotionally and physically depleted. I was extremely sick, confined to my bed, and throwing up day and night.

When I began my treatment, I was struck by the somber attitude of many of the other patients I met. Their battles with cancer had worn them out, and many seemed resigned to what they perceived as a grim fate. I saw their lack of hope, and I decided to do something about it.

During my own twice-weekly infusion treatments, I held raffles for the other patients. I asked for donations from business owners to use as prizes. I would walk around the infusion room and meet with each patient and ask them to pick a number between 1 and 100. I drew three names each day I was there, and I gave the winners donated prizes to take home. I wanted those patients to feel like winners for the day; I wanted those small prizes to give them an ounce of hope to take home. It worked. I saw smiles from people I never saw smile before. It was an experience that I will never forget. It gave me hope that I, too, could feel like a winner, despite the challenges that faced me.

The Power of Perseverance

Upon being diagnosed with cancer, every day became a challenge as I tried to process the news and imagine how my life would be affected. Prior to learning that I had multiple myeloma, I was planning to participate in a 200-mile bike race from Logan, Utah, to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, (the LOTOJA race). But learning that I had cancer changed everything. Instead of cycling, I would be fighting for my life.

However, my brother-in-law didn't want me to dwell on what I thought I couldn't do. Shortly after my diagnosis, he asked my wife if he could sign me up for the LOTOJA cycling event to give me something to look forward to. That turned out to be just what I needed. I realized that I wasn't dead, and I certainly wasn't going to give up. Even if I was only able to do part of the race, it gave me something to work toward as I started my grueling treatment regimen.

I did my best to continue to ride my bike during my induction therapy. But once I had my stem cell transplant, training became nearly impossible. I just kept hoping that somehow I could show up for the race and do my best. I knew I couldn't make all 200 miles, but when the day came, with the help of some friends, I climbed on my bike and did what I could. To my surprise, I completed the final 26 miles of the course. To this day, I don't know how I did it. I just rode on adrenaline. Cycling those miles taught me a great deal. The world tells us, "You have cancer; you can't do that." The question is, will we choose to believe that?

The next year, 2016, I signed up for the race again. I was still undergoing chemotherapy treatment, and I was not even close to my old self. But I did not want my illness

to define me. I rode more than 112 miles that day—only three days after receiving chemotherapy. It was hard, for sure. But I was just so grateful to be alive.

In 2017, I worked hard on my nutrition and training regimen, and I was able to complete all 206 miles in the one-day LOTOJA event. I didn't set any records, but I completed the entire course.

The Power of Sharing

Two and a half years after my stem cell transplant, I finally completed my treatment. Today I continue to test my physical limits and stay active in my children's lives.

In an effort to support other myeloma patients and encourage them to challenge themselves, I founded the Myeloma Crowd Cycling Club to raise money for myeloma education and research (mccycling.org). In June 2019, I joined several others to cycle the California coast, riding 600 miles in six days and raising money along the way. I again found myself doing something that I previously thought impossible. It was an experience of a lifetime.

My fellow cyclists and I pledged our donations to Myeloma Crowd—a foundation begun by multiple myeloma patient Jenny Ahlstrom—that provides patient education, advocacy, and research funding for multiple myeloma (myelomacrowd.org). I chose to support Myeloma Crowd because the resources it provides have been a tremendous support to me.

In particular, HealthTree—the platform created by Myeloma Crowd—uses patient-reported clinical data and treatment responses to help patients identify their most promising treatment options. It can suggest additional treatment possibilities

that are not limited to the options offered at one treatment center. This helps patients navigate their disease and provides a database for the research community, with the ultimate goal of accelerating a cure. The 4,200 patients who use HealthTree represent 4 percent of all U.S. patients with multiple myeloma.

Myeloma Crowd has helped me explore my treatment options, track my disease, and share my clinical information with patients and researchers. All of this has helped me own my unique cancer journey. Most important, Myeloma Crowd has introduced me to a community of other engaged patients who have taught me the importance of a positive attitude.

Life is hard, and cancer stinks. But I would not trade the lessons that it has taught me. We can all do difficult things, and we must never give up hope. Never forget to take the time to make new memories. And always remember to live. 📺

Richard Hite, a multiple myeloma patient, is the founder of the Myeloma Crowd Cycling Club, an organization that brings people together to ride and raise money toward a cure for multiple myeloma. He lives in Utah with his wife and three children.



(Top) Richard at home with his three children and family dog. (Bottom) Richard and his family during the Myeloma Crowd Cycling Club's "Bike the Coast" fundraiser, a 600-mile bike ride from San Francisco to San Diego to raise money for the Myeloma Crowd Research Initiative.