rare book dealer for over 40 years, Bill Reese is used to looking into the past for answers, but a recent significant gift to Daniel Petrylak, MD, Professor of Medicine (Medical Oncology) and Urology, has him focused on the future. Bill specializes in the literature of the early history of the Americas and travels and voyages. In 1975, he launched his career as a sophomore at Yale University (class of ’77) by selling a rare map of the Valley of Mexico from 1563 to the University, thus cementing a long-lasting relationship.

In 2013, when Bill was diagnosed with prostate cancer, he took a page from his own work and began a search for the best care possible. After consulting with doctors at Johns Hopkins in Maryland, where he is originally from, Bill realized his treatment would be complex and he would prefer to be closer to his home in New Haven. This led him to Dr. Petrylak and his team at Smilow Cancer Hospital. It was great news for Bill to hear that he could receive the care he needed, near his home.

Bill has a long history of supporting research, having funded over 200 research fellowships on historical topics at 13 institutions. He has always recognized the power of research and the impact it can have on future generations, which is why it was a natural step for him to extend this thinking to the medical field and the transformative research in Dr. Petrylak’s lab. His gift will support translational research in prostate cancer and help to improve personalized medicine.

Dr. Petrylak has directed several groundbreaking studies over the years, most notably his trial that demonstrated a survival benefit for docetaxel-based therapy in men with advanced prostate cancer. This trial led to the approval of docetaxel for hormone refractory prostate cancer by the FDA, which until recently was the only approved treatment available. However, in the last few years, there has been immense progress.

“The progress we have seen lately only happens because science is supported by people like Bill, who realize research is the future,” said Dr. Petrylak. One of the main goals, commented Dr. Petrylak, is the formation of a SPORE (Specialized Programs of Research Excellence) in Prostate Cancer, which would support multidisciplinary research and help to quickly translate laboratory discoveries to patients. “Gifts like Bill’s support pilot trials that help us build our program and move the process forward.”

Two of the treatment modalities Bill received did not exist when he was first diagnosed, including treatment with Radium 223, which shows improved overall survival in men with advanced prostate cancer that has spread to the bones. Bill was also tested, and found to carry the BRCA gene, which researchers are discovering is related to more and more cancers other than just breast cancer. In fact, twenty percent of all prostate cancers are related to the BRCA gene.

“In my opinion, an optimistic view is the best view to have when facing cancer,” said Bill. “There is reason to hope. The pace and development of new therapies is amazing, and we must keep it moving forward. The wonderful thing about Smilow is the ability to establish relationships not only with your doctor, but other staff as well. It is a large enough center that they can offer you advanced treatment with cutting-edge technology, while at the same time being small enough that you don’t get lost in the shuffle. It is truly the best of both worlds here.”

Since his diagnosis, Bill has written and published three books, continues his work as a rare book dealer, and remains an active runner. He lost one sister to breast cancer, and watched his other sister undergo treatment for the disease. For him, gifts like this are insurance for the future and he feels fortunate to be able to support Dr. Petrylak and his research. For someone focused on travels and voyages from the past, Bill has come a long way himself in his journey towards a brighter future for patients with prostate cancer.

Along the way, Dr. Petrylak has followed Bill’s progress closely, and has been able to incorporate the latest treatment advances into this care. “Despite how far we have come, we still have a long way to go. Patients like Bill, who are so involved with their care, are inspiring and keep us moving forward in more ways than one.”

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