

The Battle to Win the Race Against Melanoma Cancer is On!

-Mack Shults-

The battle against metastatic melanoma cancer has been tremendously inspired by Rebeca Shults Campos who was only 26 years old when she died from this horrific disease. Hearing the diagnosis “you are dying” was tragic news, mind-boggling and unbelievable to Rebeca and her family. After this tremendous shock, Beca with barely 24 years behind her, with a college education and standing on the rainbow of a brilliant future and even hearing the joyous sound of wedding bells, was determined to fight her cancer. Her fight would not be centered on herself but on all who struggle with the illness. With faith in her Lord Jesus Christ, her vision of a world without melanoma began to grow into a relentless marathon.

The Blackout Melanoma Foundation was born to fulfill Beca’s dream. The battle pains of the movement got off to a great start to raise funds for the education of prevention, detection and treatment of the illness, through the following:

- A silent auction in St. Louis, MO. (Beca’s home city)
- A banquet sponsored by the First Baptist Church of Henderson, KY.
- The establishment of Beca’s 5K races
- The 1st Beca’s 5K Run/Walk was in St. Louis in June of 2010.
- The 1st Beca’s 5K in Henderson was in November of 2013...

What about Beca’s vision to give hope and courage that the possibility of a cure can become a reality? What real progress has been made in this great battle? Consider the very positive steps which have been taken to ‘Blackout Melanoma.’

-Beca started out by learning everything known about the disease.

-Beca courageously gave her own body to the doctors and scientists for a study at the National Institute of Health where her own “miracle” T-cells were used to explore the methods of treatment. Her “break-through” experiments have given hope for means to fight this deadly form of cancer. Her progress even received the attention of a national TV broadcast.

-Aneta Campos, Beca’s mother, showed through Caring Bridge how God can take the worst nightmares of life, the hardest blows that life can throw, and teach us the truth that real character shines through adversity and suffering. Through her witness to the strength of faith in Christ, Aneta was an example of selfless devotion and love to a child in unthinkable circumstances. Even though life is often unfair, difficult, and disappointing, it still pays to serve Jesus through our earthly journey. One day life’s trials will be swallowed up by eternity and all God’s family will rejoice together forever.

-The Annual Races have grown tremendously and have drawn people from Japan, Brazil, Africa and from several states in the USA.

-Thousands of dollars have been raised for cancer research and to provide aid to families battling the illness. Two families in Missouri are presently being helped.

In May, 2014—"Melanoma and Skin Cancer Awareness Month"-- Aneta Shults Campos, Founder and President of the Blackout Melanoma Foundation, entered into a partnership with Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO. With their first \$50,000 research grant for clinical research projects that explore innovative approaches to understanding melanoma and its treatment in order to move closer to a cure. Those closely involved in the research project are Dr. Lynn A. Cornelius is a Professor in the Chief Division of Dermatology; Dr. Shivani Tripathi, a Research Physician, and Dr. Gerald P. Linette, Associate Professor of Medicine in Medical Oncology. Dr. Linette also cared for Beca during her personal battle with melanoma. Dr. Cornelius and Dr. Linette also run Beca's 5Ks.

The research grant, along side of other grants, is already showing positive results. In a report published April 2, 2015 in "Science Express," Dr. Linette stated, "our team has developed a new strategy for personalized cancer immunotherapy." This strategy involves personalized melanoma vaccines used to marshal a powerful immune response against unique mutations in a patient's tumors. This new approach has great possibilities as an important first step to personalized immune-based cancer treatments.

In the Henderson race of 2013, Sharon Cates, a highly recognized citizen of Henderson, was present and was honored by a team of runners from the Cates Farm and by the Blackout Melanoma Foundation. Sharon was a victim of melanoma. Other families of the Tri-State area who had lost loved ones to the disease or who were fighting the battle, were also honored.

The St. Louis Cardinals baseball team from the diagnosis of Beca's illness has given great appeals for their fans to join the fight to win against melanoma. On one occasion over 44,000 fans and some 300 supporters of Beca's 5K saw Beca's mom throw out the first pitch of the game. An additional promotional event, at a Cardinal game will take place on June 13 in St. Louis.

Beca passed away on May 19, 2011 in the Barnes-Jewish Hospital of St. Louis. Her courageous and painful journey to blaze a path to 'blackout' melanoma was not in vain. Her doctors, her nurses, and the hospital's personnel were so moved by her faith that they have become great supporters of Beca's 5K. Other doctors, nurses, hospitals, businesses, banks, industries, Dermatology Associations, churches, and a host of individuals in the St. Louis and Tri-State areas have gladly joined the battle.

A special plaque on a city park bench in St. Louis commemorates Beca's fight that scarred her body, but could never blemish her soul. Faithful to her Lord and Savior even when times were critical and her suffering was far beyond description, Beca always said "I'm fine." Then on the day she looked on the face of Jesus, He wiped away every tear and said "Beca, Welcome Home! Now you are Really Fine!"

Today Beca's 5K challenges us to fight to win the marathon to 'Blackout Melanoma.' The war against melanoma goes on. Almost every hour melanoma takes another life. Almost 10,000 people die each year in the USA alone and more than 65,000 new cases will be diagnosed. Melanoma is the most common form of cancer for young adults 25-29 years old, and the second most common cancer in adolescents. Melanoma is on the rise. However melanoma can be stopped! Prevention and early detection are the keys to healthy skin. When tumors are detected very early and have not penetrated deep into the skin, the survival rate from melanoma is as high as 99 percent. Deep tumors, known as metastatic melanoma, are usually diagnosed with the shocking news, like Beca heard, "you know that you are dying, don't you?" No one should ever have to hear these words! Thus knowledge of the causes of melanoma, the risk factors, the methods of prevention, the importance of an early diagnosis, and the present methods of treatment are factors of life or death. Risk factors are highest among people with pale skin color, facial freckling, red hair, blue eyes and a great number of pigmented spots on the skin, such as moles. Everyone should be discouraged from using tanning beds and encouraged to stay out of the mid-day sun and to use protective clothing and proper sunscreen. These are very small factors compared to the enormous cost of treating metastatic melanoma. In the last few years, the Food and Drug Administration has approved two revolutionary drugs to treat metastatic melanoma for people whose life expectancy is measured in months. One of the drugs is called Yervoy and may extend life for a while. However, this drug works for less than 20 percent of patients and cost \$120,000 for a course of treatment of three months. The other drug is Zelboraf and has been effective in 50 percent of patients who had a specific genetic mutation called BRAF V600 E. Even this drug has no certainty to provide help forever and cost \$56,000 for a standard six-month course of treatment. The best treatments for melanoma are the preventative steps one takes every day. Get educated with the facts! Visit your dermatologist often! Examine every mole, freckle, and spot on your body and be alert to any change.

We are in the Race of Life or Death! Get in the Race for Life! Join Beca's vision of a world without melanoma!

The next annual Beca's 5K for St. Louis is scheduled for September 19, 2015 at Creve Coeur Lake.