About the Advanced Breast Cancer (ABC) Program

MD Anderson’s advanced breast cancer (ABC) clinic offers personalized treatment from many of the nation’s top breast cancer care providers using the most advanced diagnostics and therapies. It is open to anyone seeking care for newly diagnosed advanced (metastatic) breast cancer or whose cancer has recently progressed to the advanced stage.

The clinic team will navigate the patient through the application process. This includes helping the patient apply to the trial, answering questions about the proposed treatment, transitioning the patient onto the trial and coordinating care between different teams. For patients not qualifying or not interested in a trial, standard and personalized options will be reviewed.

“I am not one of those people who will say that cancer is a blessing or cancer made me a better person. It’s an insidious disease that continues to strip life from far too many of us, and it’s time we did something about it. We need a cure. But, in the meantime, I am motivated to make changes to help others through this nightmare, and the ABC clinic is one of those things that will make a difference”

- Alex Frenzel, Patient Advocate

The ABC program began as an idea from metastatic breast cancer patients in 2012. Through their advocacy, hard work and philanthropic efforts, their dream has become a reality. The ABC program offers a patient’s perspective of the unique needs of these patients. The ABC program receives most of its funds through MD Anderson’s Boot Walk to End Cancer® and from donations from supportive individuals.

The ABC program is creating a registry database specific for metastatic breast cancer patients. The registry will assess physical and quality-of-life measures of patients with ABC. We will study the relationships among demographics, genomic and treatment variables, and patient reported outcomes across the entire course of treatment.

The registry will identify outcomes, including optimal treatment patterns and predictive factors, that could help personalize treatment decisions. This information will be used to optimize treatment, patient reported outcome monitoring and follow-up for individuals with ABC, serving as a model for other registries. It will help inform future patient-focused care and research strategies.
Sandra’s Story

A Tribute by Gail Barr, Patient Advocate

Sandra Bishnoi was a true inspiration. I doubt she knew how many lives she touched, inspired and made better—her family, friends, colleagues, students, doctors, and fellow patients. She was a loving wife, a mother to her 11-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter, a scientist, a professor at Rice University and an advocate for advanced breast cancer.

During her time at Rice University, Sandra was instrumental in establishing the Sustaining Excellence in Research (SER) Scholars Program. She also taught the hands-on Introduction to Scientific Research Challenges course for freshmen to give them the opportunity to do research on practical projects with funding from a Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant. An endowment to SER by the Bishnoi family will continue this program as a legacy to her belief in the ability of her students to succeed.

Sandra was the impetus for starting the support group for metastatic breast cancer at MD Anderson, and she was a driving force behind the efforts to establish a Center of Excellence for metastatic breast cancer at MD Anderson. She also was a strong supporter of the Stomp Out Stage IV Breast Cancer Team at the MD Anderson Boot Walk to End Cancer®.

Sandra will continue to be an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Meet the ABC Pilot Physicians

Debasish Tripathy, M.D.
Professor and Chair
Breast Medical Oncology

Naoto Tada Ueno, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.P.
Professor
Breast Medical Oncology
Executive Director
Morgan Welch
Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Program and Clinic

Jennifer Keating Litton, M.D.
Associate Professor
Breast Medical Oncology
Section Chief Clinical Trials
Breast Medical Oncology

Bora Lim, M.D.
Assistant Professor
Breast Medical Oncology
Morgan Welch
Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Program
Spotlights

Alex Frenzel, Patient Advocate

Alex Frenzel was 10 years old when her mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, and 15 when she died of the disease. She was 29 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Doctors treated her with chemotherapy and radiation, performing surgeries to remove breasts, lymph nodes and ovaries, followed by years of observation. The burden became lighter each year as she continued to be disease-free. She was 45 when it came back. This time it had crept into her bones.

She asked herself many questions such as, “Where do I go? What are my options? Who can help me?” Those questions flooded her mind after an advanced breast cancer diagnosis. Her worst fears ignited as she scrambled to find answers. She felt isolated because the majority of information she found was related to awareness, early detection and early stage breast cancer.

The Nellie B. Connally Breast Center and ABC program is a starting place for many patients to find answers, to ease fears and to put a plan in action to extend life with treatments of a complicated disease.

Alex joined the Stomp Out Stage IV Breast Cancer Boot Walk team in 2017 after she learned of their efforts to raise funds to help create an ABC program. Metastatic breast cancer patients, doctors and advocates were already hard at work trying to establish the beginnings of this new clinic. The need was identified and the mission was clear, but it would take a lot of effort from many people to see it come to fruition. She knew then that she wanted to help with those efforts.

Abbey Kaler, MS, RN, FNP-C, CMSRN

Abbey Kaler joined Breast Medical Oncology as an advanced practice registered nurse in January 2018. She joins the advanced breast cancer (ABC) program as the Program Navigator. At the age of 9, Abbey was diagnosed with a brain tumor. After receiving treatment, she was followed in the child and adolescent center at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital until she was 21. Through this experience, she learned she wanted to become a nurse and work with cancer patients.

Abbey attended The University of Mississippi where she studied nursing. She graduated from Baptist College of Health Sciences in Memphis, Tennessee, with a Bachelor of Science in nursing. In 2012, she joined MD Anderson as a clinical nurse, working as an inpatient registered nurse with the departments of Internal Medicine, Investigative Cancer Therapeutics Phase 1 and Pediatrics. She went on to graduate from Texas Women's University with a Master of Science and to earn a certification as a family nurse practitioner. She joins the ABC program with a wealth of knowledge in the areas of advanced breast cancer, clinical trials, patient support and process management.

Abbey is wife to Michael, mom to Emily (1) and puppy mom to Marshall (beagle) and Ruger (chocolate labrador). In her free time, she loves to spend time with her family, traveling and doing crafts.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Upcoming Town Hall Meetings for 2019:
Location ACB1.2345
Time 12-1:30 p.m.

Jan. 29, 2019
March 26, 2019
June 26, 2019
Sept. 24, 2019

SATURDAY, NOV. 10 | 1 P.M. | TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER

BOOT WALK to #endcancer®
Boot Walk to End Cancer

The ABC program has grown substantially through the generosity of those supporting the Boot Walk to End Cancer®, specifically the Stomp Out Stage IV Breast Cancer team. The resources gained through the Boot Walk have helped the ABC program to grow from an idea of patient advocates into a reality with faculty and staff support. Our program now includes a full time advanced practice registered nurse in the role of patient navigator who will meet with ABC patients individually. The support from the Boot Walk also has supported the Breast Medical Oncology database team to produce reports and metrics for the ABC program, detailing areas of efficacy and quality improvement. The contributions from the Boot Walk allow us to provide seamless, state-of-the-art and personalized care to patients with advanced breast cancer.

If you would like to donate, join the team or learn more, please visit https://bit.ly/2LHIIOA

Advanced Breast Cancer Program Team
Name: Stomp Out Stage IV Breast Cancer

Through the first two Boot Walk to End Cancer, the team has raised $204,530.05 for the ABC program! This year we have raised over $86,000. Join the fun!

Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group

Date: 1st Wednesdays of each month
11 a.m.-12 p.m.

Location: Mays Clinic
Integrative Medicine Center
Room ACB2.1049b

Contact: Mary Dev, LCSW
713-563-9440

From left: Gail Barr, Alex Frenzel, Samantha Dewey, Sandra Bishnoi
Photo: Courtesy of Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group
ABC Clinical Trials-Focus on Immunotherapy

At MD Anderson, our clinicians and researchers have been diligently evaluating the potential of new immunotherapies and combinations of therapies, searching for the key to unlock the power of the immune system to effectively treat breast cancers. Breast cancers generally have been considered to be poorly immunogenic – very few infiltrating immune cells target the tumors, limiting the power of approved treatments. Our Breast Cancer Immunotherapy Initiative allows us to collect and study tumor biopsies and/or blood samples from patients so we can learn more about the immune response to breast cancer and formulate better new therapies.

Currently, our immunotherapy program includes vaccines, checkpoint inhibitors/immune modulators and adjuvant immunotherapies. Immune checkpoint inhibitors/immune modulators work by targeting molecules that regulate the immune system. By blocking molecules that inhibit or activating molecules that stimulate immune responses, these therapies can unleash immune activities or enhance pre-existing anti-tumor immune responses. The successes of checkpoint inhibitor therapies in various types of cancer and the recent positive results from Impassion130, the phase III, multicenter, randomized, double-blind study evaluating Atezolizumab and nab-Paclitaxel in patients with locally advanced or metastatic triple negative cancer, are highly encouraging and provide the impetus for charging forward to further develop immunotherapies.

Over the last two years, our immunotherapy portfolio evaluating checkpoint inhibitors/immune modulators, antibodies and adjuvant immunotherapies has grown to include 19 active trials, several of which are designed specifically for patients with advanced breast cancer. Here we highlight few of these studies.

**Protocol 2017-0499: A phase I Radiation and CHEckpoint bLockade trial in patients with metastatic hormone receptor positive, HER2 negative breast cancer (RACHEL1)**

The goal of this study is to determine the highest dose of M7824 (a bifunctional antibody that targets checkpoint inhibitor PD-L1 and neutralizes TGF-βR11) that can be given with radiation therapy to patients with metastatic hormone receptor positive, HER2-negative breast cancer. Blocking the checkpoint inhibitor and neutralizing TGF-βR11 suppresses tumor growth and metastasis, likely generating increased CD8+ T cell responses to tumor antigens, hopefully increasing the immune system’s ability to target and destroy cancer cells.

Patients will receive M7824 every 2 weeks by IV. Radiation therapy is given after the second dose of M7824. (See trial schema below.)

**2017-0500: A phase Ib trial of M7824 and eribulin in patients with metastatic triple negative breast cancer**

This trial is designed to determine the best dose of eribulin mesylate when given with M7824 (a bifunctional antibody that targets the checkpoint inhibitor, PD-L1 and TGF-βR11) in patients with metastatic triple negative breast cancer.

**2014-0533: Pembrolizumab (anti-PD-1) Therapy in Patients with Metastatic IBC or Triple Negative Breast Cancer Who Have Received Prior Chemotherapy With Complete or Partial Response**

This trial is designed to learn if pembrolizumab (also called MK-3475 and Keytruda) can help to control metastatic inflammatory breast cancer and triple negative breast cancer. The safety of this drug also will be studied.

**2016-0890: A phase II study of triple combination of Atezolizumab + Cobimetinib + Eribulin (ACE) in patients with recurrent/metastatic inflammatory breast cancer**

This trial is designed to determine if the combination of Atezolizumab, Cobimetinib and Eribulin is capable of controlling metastatic inflammatory breast cancer. Atezolizumab is a monoclonal antibody that targets PD-L1, a cell checkpoint inhibitor.

**Current ABC Clinical Trials**

Please visit https://bit.ly/2KzuJ2g for the full list of current ABC clinical trials.

If you are interested in learning more about our clinical trials or lab studies, please email the ABC program directly at ABCProgram@mdanderson.org.
We are witnessing an era when advances in treating cancer are coming at a rapid pace, but we have much further to go. Our ABC program is emblematic of this movement and is designed to facilitate and inform the delivery of personalized diagnosis and care for advanced breast cancer.

What exactly does “personalized” medicine mean? We believe that this represents the understanding that each case of breast cancer is unique - not only in a biological and genetic manner in reference to cancer cells, but also in regard to the affected person and to their community. Every individual has unique goals, aspirations and values that guide their care along with the scientific and clinical considerations. When a patient is diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, their life is forever changed seemingly in an instant. They need support, advice, options and rapid decision making. We want to make sure they have the expertise, compassion, navigation and educational material to begin the process and to be available at every turn in the road.

We began our program with initial input from patients and patient advocates who have been working with us for years advising on clinical and research projects. We heard powerful and convincing guiding principles that involved navigation, education, expertise as well as access to clinical trials and additional subspecialty care. We have enacted the building blocks to meet these bars most important, bringing Abbey Kaler, on as our navigator and “program builder.”

We welcome all interested individuals to become engaged as we move forward with meeting our important mission. We invite you to read this newsletter and to attend our quarterly Town Hall meetings for updates on our progress and to provide critical feedback. We believe that our program and approach can be a model for others, and we look forward to being the best we can be for our patients.

Debasish Tripathy, M.D.
Professor and Chair
Breast Medical Oncology

Recent Publications


2. Long-Term Survival of De Novo Stage IV (HER2 Positive Breast Cancers Treated with HER2-Targeted Therapy. *The Oncologist.* Dr. Rashmi Murthy, corresponding author.


5. Tucatinib with capecitabine and trastuzumab in advanced HER2-positive metastatic breast cancer with and without brain metastases: a non-randomised, open-label, phase 1b study. *Lancet Oncology.* Dr. Rashmi Murthy, first author.

Media Appearances


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