

Sarcoma Services

collaborate

There are more than 100 types of cancer. While some cancers are common, others such as sarcomas are very rare.

Sarcomas occur in bone and soft tissue, accounting for approximately one percent of adult cancers and 15 percent of childhood cancers. Limited understanding and misdiagnosis led to poor prognoses for sarcoma patients in the past. Sarcoma Services at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) aims to reduce the incidence and improve outcomes of sarcomas through collaborative research and comprehensive treatment.

Directed by R. Lor Randall, MD, FACS, HCI investigator and associate professor in the Department of Orthopaedics at the University of Utah, the Sarcoma Services team includes a multidisciplinary group of experts, from oncologists and radiologists to scientists and social workers. The team treats patients of all ages across the Intermountain West.

“Sarcoma Services is a paragon of the ‘sum is greater than its parts’ metaphor,” says Randall. “Our multidisciplinary approach has dramatically improved the clinical care available to sarcoma patients. Just as important are the contributions made by our basic and translational researchers

as they search for novel treatments with fewer side effects.”

Sarcoma Services researchers investigate the causes of this disease in a variety of settings, including HCI’s Sarcoma Array Research Consortium (SARC) Lab, and the labs of HCI investigators Lessnick, Virshup, Beckerle, and Bernard. Studies include molecular analyses of aggressive sarcomas. “This helps us identify how cancer cells work in sarcomas and why,” explains Randall.

HCI’s Sarcoma Services also collaborates with leaders at the national and international levels. These include the National Cancer Institute, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Children’s Oncology Group, the Southwest Oncology Group, and others. “By sharing data and results, scientists and physicians learn from and build upon each other’s work,” says Randall, “which results in better, more rapid outcomes for patients.”



On a warm July afternoon, more than 60 people hiked, biked, or drove six miles up City Creek Canyon just north of downtown Salt Lake City. As participants in Team Sarcoma Utah 2006, they were there to raise awareness about sarcoma, a rare cancer of the connective tissue.

For one family, the occasion held particular meaning: They attended in memory of Joel Gines, their son, brother, husband, and father, who died of synovial sarcoma, cancer that occurs near a joint, in February 2004. With their two young children, wearing T-shirts that read “Walkin’ for Daddy,” Joel’s wife Charakie Gines supported the cause.

“It helps the healing process to be involved,” Charakie says. “Even though your loved one is gone, you feel the connection again. You are doing something for them. This is what I *can* do.”

Charakie has this advice for others who have lost someone to cancer: “Remember the sun comes up the next day. It takes baby steps. Joel wanted me to be happy, and for the kids to know him and be happy. Remember what they would want for you and try to live that way for them.”