A Victory Over Cancer: A Gift for Others
Some people hear a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and think “death sentence.” Not Paul Jordan.

F or Paul Jordan and his wife, Angi, his diagnosis meant it was time to rally together and fight back. And, whether fortunately or unfortunately, the couple knew where to start: A few years back, Angi had experienced a health scare of her own. In their quest to find the best physicians for her, the Tennessee-based couple turned to U.S. News & World Report’s best hospitals rankings and to Castle Connolly’s best physicians for her, their quest to find the couple’s two sons—and doing well. So back for four days, today he’s back home with his family—including the couple’s two sons—and doing well. So well, in fact, that the Jordan family was inspired to give something back.

And so they sponsored the Paul and Angela Jordan Lectureship in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery, an educational symposium focused on increasing the awareness and dialogue about pancreatic cancer and fostering collaboration among physician-researchers at Johns Hopkins and beyond. “If we can do anything that enables other people to have the same experience we’ve had with the expert surgical care and support we’ve received, then it’s worth every penny,” Angi says. “We hope to continue to be fortunate enough to be able to give more in the future.”

Research

Falling short of bariatric surgery qualifications, however, doesn’t mean a patient might not benefit from the procedure, says —continued on back page
The Influence of Michael Choti

After a 21-year career at one of the nation’s most distinguished hospitals, surgical oncologist Michael Choti has moved on to lead the surgery department at one of the country’s newest.

Choti completed his general surgery training at the University of Pennsylvania and a surgical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center before joining the full-time faculty of The Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1992. As vice chair of the Department of Surgery and a professor of surgery, oncology and radiology, much of his research focused on surgical innovation, including robotics and image-guided surgical cancer therapy. In September, however, he left Johns Hopkins to join the faculty of UT Southwestern Medical Center as chair of the Department of Surgery at William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital, which opens in 2014.

“I’m confident that the department will prosper under Dr. Choti’s leadership,” says Gregory Fitz, dean of UT Southwestern Medical School. “His perspectives in science, education, and exemplary clinical care and research will make a difference.”

A highly sought-after surgeon, Choti was a favorite among patients, many of whom were so grateful for the care they received under his watch that they decided to give back through donations and fundraising. One of these people is Dwayne Frazier, the cousin of one of Choti’s patients at Johns Hopkins, Shawn Felty. “Shawn really liked Dr. Choti,” recalls Frazier. “They just had a really great connection. It was a perfect match for us. The time Dr. Choti took to talk to my cousin and his dad, to really sit and have conversations with them before and after the surgery, meant so much to us. It just felt right. At some hospitals, you’re really just a number. But it wasn’t like that at Johns Hopkins.”

Anything but Par for the Course

In memory of beloved brother, Cliff, Jeff Copeland creates golf tournament to raise funds in support of cancer research awareness.

Jeff Copeland had never been a golfer. But when his twin brother, Cliff, was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer, the sport gained a foothold in his life.

In January 2004, Cliff sought treatment, including chemotherapy, from Johns Hopkins surgical oncologist Michael Choti. As family members rallied around Cliff, Jeff felt that he needed to do more. So, once Cliff’s disease was in remission, Jeff decided to try his hand at raising money for colon cancer awareness. And, as CEO of the Virginia-based consulting company immixGroup, Jeff had the perfect means to see his goal through.

Two years before, Jeff’s company had started an annual golf tournament at The Golf Club at Lansdowne in Lansdowne, Virginia. Back then, the tournament was a noncharitable venture intended to thank clients for their business. But, having faced Cliff’s illness, Jeff and his family realized that the tournament was a perfect fundraising opportunity.
I wouldn’t be where I am today without Mike Choti. For one thing, he was my surgeon and he saved my life. Then, he hired me to do patient education work for him in 2002; that was all his vision. I could not have done it without his persistence, his guidance and his knowledge. He asked me to work for him when I went for my first follow-up visit after surgery. I was so young then, and I was still going through treatment. Plus, I already was working at Johns Hopkins as a program coordinator for what was then the Office of Faculty, Staff and Retiree Programs, and I loved my job. My head was spinning. I turned him down. Every time I went back for a follow-up appointment, he’d say, “Are you ready?” and my answer was always the same: “No.” However, each visit I would feel more and more excited about the prospects of working for him. Finally I was ready, and I was fortunate he still had the opportunity available for me.

Later, when I wanted to pursue medical education through nursing, he was instrumental in supporting me through nursing school, when I combined working for him with my studies. In so many ways, I wouldn’t be where I am today without him.

—Eden Stotsky-Himelfarb

With some excess unrestricted funds, Mike decided to create an award to honor faculty earning the highest ratings in patient satisfaction. He is a wonderful example of a patient-centered surgeon, as his patients just love him. The first annual Michael A. Choti, M.D., Faculty Patient Satisfaction Award will be given in June 2015—a $5,000 gift to the surgery faculty member earning the highest ranking from our Press Ganey survey. We have teaching awards and residency awards, but we’ve never really had an award for patient satisfaction, so this is unique. We announced the award at his farewell dinner, and people were delighted. I think they’ll be more excited when they win!

—Julie Freischlag

Jeff Copeland, oncologist Michael Choti and Cliff Copeland together at immixGroup’s charity golf tournament.

At his sister’s urging, Jeff—with his company’s support—decided to turn the event into a fundraiser and use the proceeds to increase education and awareness about colon cancer. Choosing a benefactor was easy. “When I asked my brother where he wanted the proceeds to go, he immediately said, ‘Dr. Choti,’” Jeff says. Unfortunately, Cliff Copeland passed away in 2012. Still grateful for the care he received at Johns Hopkins, Copeland’s family requested donations be made to Choti’s research in lieu of flowers. Meanwhile, the fundraiser continues going strong.

Now entering its eighth year, the tournament has raised more than $1 million for Johns Hopkins through corporate sponsors, including technology giants like Hewlett-Packard, SAP, Oracle and Symantec.

So far, the proceeds have provided support for a surgical oncology fellowship, as well as various activities of the Johns Hopkins Colon Cancer Center, including a patient education day and a newsletter. “Often it’s not until you or someone you love actually contracts a serious disease that you start learning about it,” Jeff says. “Education becomes an important part of dealing with illness.”
bariatric surgeon Michael Schweitzer, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Bariatric Surgery at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. For instance, he says, take patients with type 2 diabetes. Increasing evidence indicates that diabetics can have better outcomes following weight loss surgery—including those who don’t meet the traditional BMI requirement. With that in mind, Schweitzer and his colleagues are running a clinical trial offering bariatric surgery—either laparoscopic band or gastric bypass—to diabetic patients with a BMI between 30 and 40. The idea, he says, is to see whether the resulting weight loss ultimately leads to resolution of their diabetes or other comorbidities.

“This trial includes those patients with a lower BMI,” Schweitzer says. “In the past, those patients weren’t offered surgery. But gastric bypass and laparoscopic band surgery have both shown excellent results in resolving health problems compared to diet alone.”

Weight loss surgery can be particularly valuable to those with type 2 diabetes, who can be particularly prone to weight gain. “Eighty percent of type 2 diabetics are overweight,” Schweitzer says. “Most diabetic medications make you gain weight, so they make the problem worse. If you don’t intervene and solely give them medication, in the long run they gain weight and could have worse outcomes.”

To find out more about this trial or more of Schweitzer’s ongoing research, call 410-550-0409.

Michael Schweitzer and colleagues want to know whether weight loss from bariatric surgery can resolve diabetes in patients with a BMI between 30 and 40.