Raising Awareness of Ovarian Cancer

Illumina employees laced up their running shoes and participated in the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition's 5K Race to Break the Silence.

Introduction

More than 25,000 women are diagnosed every year with ovarian cancer[1]. While it is the seventh most common cancer in U.S. women, it is the fifth leading cause of cancer mortality. Why? Its early symptoms of bloating, abdominal pain, and frequent urination are transient and can be mistakenly attributed to other causes, contributing to less than one-third of ovarian cancers being detected before they have spread outside the ovaries[2]. Five-year survival rates for this cancer diminish drastically as the disease progresses, with late-stage detection offering patients a dim prognosis.

Ovarian cancer survivors gather before the 5K Run to Break the Silence.

It was a beautiful fall morning as more than 2,000 runners dashed away from the start line.

A Desire to Make a Difference

Illumina hopes to change these statistics. Our ovarian cancer discovery effort is leveraging Illumina technologies to identify early detection biomarkers for at risk populations and markers that predict which patients will respond to Platinum therapy, the gold standard in treating ovarian and several other types of cancer.

This research effort has sparked a desire to raise awareness of ovarian cancer within the company. In honor of Ovarian Cancer Awareness month, Illumina sponsored the September 2010 National Ovarian Cancer Coalition's 5K Race to Break the Silence in Sacramento, CA. The more than 2,000 event participants included survivors of this deadly form of cancer.

In addition to participating as runners, Illumina employees competed in an essay contest[3], sharing their thoughts about cancer and Illumina's dedication to improving the outlook for patients with the disease. Each felt great pride in working for a company whose technologies are contributing to the development of new cancer diagnostics and therapeutics. Viewing the fight against cancer as a battlefield, Illumina Bioinformatics Scientist Kristina Little's essay summed up everyone's feelings, "our contributions can provide the winning edge, thus changing the course of the battle in an instant. I am proud to contribute to this mission. At the same time, I truly hope that one day our support will become unneccessary, and that this battle—like all battles—will come to an end."

Illumina participants are all smiles for a pre-race photo, and yes, runner #866 ran the race in his bare feet.

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Illumina Ovarian Cancer Initiative Update

Illumina is partnering with cancer research institutions throughout a multi-stage initiative that moves from discovery and validation activities, to development of an FDA approved assay. “We have already sequenced the genomes of 25 tumor and 25 normal paired specimens in an effort to identify disease associated markers,” said Greg Heath, Illumina Senior Vice President and General Manager. “Currently, identified markers are being validated using various Illumina technologies. If these markers prove successful, services will be initially offered in Illumina’s CLIA laboratory. “Ultimately we hope to deploy novel diagnostics on Illumina platforms for prospective trials and regulatory approval in the United States and CE marking for sale in Europe,” Heath added.

References

1. www.ovariancancer.org/about-ovarian-cancer/statistics/
2. www.medicinenet.com/ovarian_cancer/article.htm#2whatis
3. www.illumina.com/landing/ovarian_cancer_winners/index.html

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