

# **COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH IS CRITICAL COMPONENT OF CANCER FIGHT**

By Edward George, MD

In 1978, a Kansas City man in his early 50s was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, and was told he had three months to live.

For most people at that time, a cancer diagnosis was considered an automatic death sentence. But not to this gentleman. He was a fighter, and he refused to give up just because one doctor told him it was his only choice.

Seeking out a second opinion, the man found oncologists willing to put him on an aggressive treatment plan, and for two years, he battled his cancer until he emerged a survivor. He vowed he would devote his life to helping others win the fight against cancer, and so he did.

The gentleman was Richard Bloch, co-founder of H&R Block, the tax preparation and financial planning organization.

Within two years of winning his personal battle, Bloch had sold his interest in the company he helped build and devoted himself full-time to cancer issues. One of his many endeavors was the creation of a national day of awareness to recognize and honor cancer survivors, which marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Sunday, June 3.

Today, we're light years from 1978 in terms of what we know about cancer, its diagnosis, its treatment and most importantly, its prevention. We have made – and continue to make – dramatic advances that save lives.

Every day, we're discovering breakthroughs in early detection, in new drug therapies, and in new techniques that fuse our burgeoning knowledge of genetic building blocks with methods to seek out and destroy cancerous cells.

These developments are the result of extensive laboratory research and detailed clinical trials that provide us with scientific data to extend our knowledge of what works, how it works, and how to make it work better.

At VOA, research is a key component of our mission. Over the past several years, our oncologists have participated in a number of important clinical trials, helping further scientific knowledge about cancer and bringing the latest therapies directly to patients in our community. Clinical trial availability is critical for cancer researchers and patients alike. It is vitally important that community-based oncology centers like ours participate in furthering cancer research through clinical testing.

Because of the vast number of trials under way at any one time, there is a great need for patients who meet participation guidelines. Community-based oncology centers play a major role in identifying patients who qualify, while also extending the reach of investigational therapies.

For example, a recent review for colorectal cancer studies at [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) showed more than 200 trials that were recruiting patients. If these trials were to be conducted in only a handful of specialized centers:

- it would take much longer to find willing and able participants to fill each study, delaying research and blocking the pipeline of new cancer-fighting drugs; and
- investigational treatments and therapies would be limited to patients who either live near major teaching hospitals, or who have the means to travel to these locations and stay for extended periods of time.

That's why it's important for community-based oncology centers such as VOA to offer patients access to clinical trials. The benefits are too far-reaching for us to ignore.

And that's why research – participating in the development and discovery of new therapies that can save lives – is a critical component of our practice's mission.

Surviving cancer is a partnership of brave men and women – people like Richard Bloch and the millions of other Americans who are alive following a battle with cancer – and the researchers, scientists, pharmacologists, oncologists and other healthcare providers who continue to push the boundaries of our knowledge in the search for new weapons against cancer.

So, as we celebrate the unwavering spirit of those who have beaten cancer – and those who continue their brave fight – let us also recognize and honor the strength and spirit of those who lead us in this very important endeavor.