

Obituary

GORDON, Melinda K. , M.D. (1971-2007)

Melinda K. Gordon, M.D., died of breast cancer on October 24, 2007 at home. She was the beloved wife of Stephan Meyer, the cherished daughter of the Rev. Nancy Gordon, and the dear sister of Mary Beth DeHamer. She is also survived by her loving grandmothers, Dorothy Gordon and Aileen DeHamer, aunts and uncles and many cousins. She was predeceased by her father, Dale DeHamer, M.D., her grandfathers, James Gordon and Dwight DeHamer, and her uncle, Jim Gordon.

She was born on October 4, 1971 in Oak Ridge, TN. Melinda attended grade school in Iowa City, IA, and middle school and high school in Salem, OR. She was an honors graduate of the University of Iowa, 1993, and received her M.D. (with honors) from the University of Chicago in 1998. She completed an Internal Medicine residency at the University of California San Francisco, followed by a Clinical Medical Ethics Fellowship at the University of Chicago MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics. She then was a Hematology/Oncology Fellow at the University of Chicago from 2002-2007. Honors include Phi Beta Kappa (1992), Alpha Omega Alpha (1997), Merit (2003) and Young Investigator (2005) awards from the American Society of Clinical Oncologists, and a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the American Cancer Society (2005). She was board certified in internal medicine and in oncology.

She was diagnosed with breast cancer in July of 2005 and with metastatic breast cancer in May of 2007. After her initial diagnosis she participated in two clinical research trials because she knew the information gathered from those trials was important to addressing the many unanswered questions about cancer. As an oncologist her own research focused on doctor-patient communication concerning diagnoses and prognoses in cancer patients.

Melinda rebelled against the notion that cancer is a “blessing in disguise” or ought to improve the patient’s character, for as an oncologist she was well aware that cancer often kills. She rejected “battle” metaphors for cancer, as she felt that it devalued the experience of those who died of cancer by making them into the losers. Cancer to her was instead a thief, stealing the lives and dreams of those it afflicts. She was also adamant that she be able to speak the truth about her experience of cancer rather than play the happy patient.

From the fall of 2005 until just days before her death she was an active contributor to the youngsurvival.org message board for young woman afflicted with cancer. The comments posted before and after her death speak to the value of her presence to the other women on the board. One said, “I think we all immediately moved towards her posts because we knew the tone: always kind, informative, loving, with humor thrown in for good measure. We will truly miss her.” Another said, “I remember posting about a letter someone left me that said ‘chemo makes tumors spread in MICE.’ Melinda replied, ‘YOU AREN'T A MOUSE.’ I read her comment, laughed, turned off my computer and had a great day.”

A memorial service was held on Sunday, October 28, 2007, at 2:00 pm. at the Church of Our Saviour, 530 W. Fullerton Pkwy., Chicago, IL. Donations to the American Cancer Society, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60601, or to MERCYCORPS, Dept. W, PO Box 2669, Portland, OR 97208, or to the Melinda Gordon Memorial Fund (checks payable to the University of Chicago), University of Chicago, Office of Medical Center Development, Attn: Stephanie Dahl, 1170 E. 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637 would be appreciated.