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End Brain Cancer Initiative to Present 2024 National HOPE Award to Patrick 'Paddy' O'Donnell

LA JOLLA, Calif., July 15, 2024 – In celebration of life, Glioblastoma Awareness Day and scientific breakthroughs, the End Brain Cancer Initiative (EBCI) is proud to announce that President & CEO Dellann Elliott Mydland will present the 2024 National HOPE Award to Patrick "Paddy" O'Donnell of Carlsbad, California.

Presentation of the award will take place Tuesday, July 16, from 12:30-1p.m. at the Sanford Consortium for Regenerative Medicine, located at 2880 Torrey Pines Scenic Drive, La Jolla. Members of Paddy's care team will be in attendance. Beforehand, attendees are invited to learn more about the university's new Brain Tumor Program at the Sanford Stem Cell Institute (SSCI) via a tour of the lab of brain cancer researcher Frank Furnari, Ph.D., one of the program's directors. The tour will take place from 11 a.m.-12 p.m.

Media interested in attending the award presentation and/or the lab tour can RSVP by emailing dellann@endbraincancer.org.

Paddy O'Donnell was a 20-year-old collegiate ice hockey goaltender at the University of Utah when he was diagnosed with Glioblastoma (GBM) and three tumors. Nominated for the National HOPE Award by his mother, Anne O'Donnell, Paddy has faced his diagnosis with remarkable resilience and determination.

"He adopted a mindset that it was going to be tough, but he would beat this cancer, driven by a desire to return to a life he loved as a student with his friends and teammates," Anne O'Donnell said.

"Every May for over a decade, the End Brain Cancer Initiative has presented the National HOPE Award – a patient disease education, awareness and outreach campaign sponsored by Novocure – to a brain cancer patient who inspires us with their courage and HOPE in the face of this devastating disease," Mydland said. "Paddy is an amazing young man who deserves this honor for his strength, courage and inspiration."

"I think HOPE is really what drives us all," Paddy said. "To get up in the morning and create a better future for ourselves." Paddy's story can be viewed on YouTube here.

EBCI has been indispensable during the family's cancer journey, according to Anne O'Donnell. "The End Brain Cancer Initiative was vital in our search, at the most critical time, availing us of options and direct contact with experts in the field," she said.

Dr. Jessica Schulte – a board-certified neurologist at UC San Diego Health who treats patients with brain tumors, and a member of Paddy's care team – praised the award recipient's "incredible optimism and bravery." Paddy is nearing the two-year anniversary of his diagnosis, she said. The median survival time for glioblastoma patients is 18 months.

“Paddy has been very involved and proactive in his care since his diagnosis,” Schulte said. “He has really used positivity and willpower to keep himself going. He understands how serious this is, but he also wants to live his life – and I think that’s so important for cancer patients.”

“It takes a special person” to face glioblastoma head on with such courage and authenticity, and to serve as a role model for other patients, she added.

The SSCI’s new Brain Tumor Program, set to formally launch this fall, will explore the heterogeneity of brain tumors and target newly identified therapeutic vulnerabilities. It will also seek to engineer the next generation of human tumor avatars for further innovation. So-called tumor avatars are created by CRISPR-editing induced pluripotent stem cells – a type of stem cell derived from reprogrammed pediatric or adult cells – with common cancer mutations. Furnari will co-direct the program with Dr. Alexander Khalessi, M.D., MBA, a neurosurgeon at the UC San Diego Health, chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery and professor of neurological surgery, radiology and neurosciences.

The National HOPE Award disease education, awareness and outreach campaign is made possible by presenting sponsor Novocure and other patient disease-education sponsors. Novocure is a global oncology company working to extend survival in some of the most aggressive forms of cancer through the development and commercialization of its innovative therapy, Tumor Treating Fields. More information can be found at novocure.com.

The End Brain Cancer Initiative is celebrating 22 years of increasing patient access and promoting disease education, awareness and outreach.

The U.S. Senate passed a resolution last month designating July 17 as Glioblastoma Awareness Day, inspired by the plights of the late Sens. John McCain and Ted Kennedy, as well as the late Beau Biden, son of President Joe Biden, all of whom succumbed to the disease – and the thousands of Americans who battle it each year.

About EBCI: The End Brain Cancer Initiative is a 501(c)3 nonprofit patient organization focused on disease education, awareness, outreach and increasing patient access. EBCI, formerly known as the Chris Elliott Fund, is dedicated to ensuring that all patients diagnosed with brain cancer, a brain tumor or metastatic disease to the brain have equal access to advanced diagnostics, treatments, specialists and clinical trial participation. We believe that IMMEDIATE ACCESS to these options provides this patient community with the best HOPE for survival and sustained quality of life. We partner with industry, patients, researchers, advocacy groups, medical teams, hospital networks and others to educate patients and their caregivers so they can have empowered conversations with medical teams. Learn more about and support EBCI’s work and mission at EndBrainCancer.org.

About the Sanford Stem Cell Institute: The UC San Diego Sanford Stem Cell Institute (SSCI) is a global leader in regenerative medicine and a hub for stem cell science and innovation in space. SSCI aims to catalyze critical basic research discoveries, translational advances and clinical progress – terrestrially and in space – to develop and deliver novel therapeutics to patients. Learn more about SSCI at stemcells.ucsd.edu.

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