

In Search of a *Cure*



Bo and Christi Johnson with their daughter Addi

Ever since Bo Johnson (Appalachian State) was diagnosed with stage-4 lung cancer in May 2006, the most frequent response from others has been, “I didn’t know you smoked.” The crazy thing is, he never has. The little known fact that non-smokers can end up with lung cancer—and die from it—has Johnson and his wife Christi on a mission to spread the word and raise money for this seriously under-funded disease with a bad reputation.

In September 2006, Bo and Christi founded Addi’s Cure, a non-profit organization named after their 17-month-old daughter, to benefit lung cancer research and education. The Johnsons didn’t know about Bo’s cancer when Addi was born, and although Bo doesn’t feel sick today, they know his cancer is serious and unpredictable. They founded Addi’s Cure with the hope that Addi—and other children—might have the opportunity to know their daddy.

The Johnson’s endeavor is intended to help people understand the prevalence of lung cancer, which has been the leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. for several decades. According to www.lung-cancer.org, 87% of lung cancers are smoking related, but not everyone who develops lung cancer is or was a smoker.

“They don’t know what causes lung cancer in non-smokers, whether it’s environmental or genetic. In addition, most smokers who are diagnosed with lung cancer today are 60-70 years old and didn’t know the risks of smoking when they started. Everyone smoked when they were young—movie stars, sports figures, you could even smoke in your office.

However, the stigma of lung cancer as a ‘smokers-disease’ has kept it horribly under-funded,” says Johnson. He’s learned a great deal about the disease and specifically that lung cancer deaths look a lot like pneumonia; therefore, he explains, “We have no idea how many people could have actually died of lung cancer before it was identified with smoking.”

Equally as important as lung cancer education is funding for research directed

toward a cure. The Johnson's plan for distributing funds raised by Addi's Cure is twofold. Fifty-percent of the donations go directly to Duke Medical Hospital to fund immediate needs in lung cancer research. The other 50% is held in an interest-bearing account, and the interest is collected at the end of every year and again distributed to Duke Medical Hospital. Their goal is to grow that interest-bearing account to \$1,000,000 in order to provide consistent funding to the Hospital. Reaching that million dollar goal would mean they've also raised an additional \$1 million already contributed to Duke—totaling close to the same amount of government funding assigned to lung cancer research in all of 2005.

Although funding for research of other cancers such as breast, prostate and colon cancer have escalated over the years, lung cancer still remains significantly under-funded. Research for other cancers has increased the survival rate for many patients, however "the under funding of lung cancer research has kept its survival rate almost as low as it was in 1971," according to www.addiscure.org. In 2004, spending on lung cancer research was approximately \$1,723 per lung cancer death, while spending on breast cancer research was \$13,953 per death, prostate cancer was \$10,318 and colorectal cancer was \$4,618 (lungcancer.org). This disparity further emphasizes the need for increased education and funding for lung cancer research.

After receiving his diagnosis Johnson promptly entered clinical research trials at Duke Medical Hospital in Durham, N.C. According to a February 2007 article in Duke's Cancer Center Notes, he is participating in an innovative new targeted therapy with a team of clinical oncologists and laboratory investigators who are seeking to develop better cancer treatments. He has endured six rounds of chemotherapy as part of the clinical trials. "The doctors at Duke have been incredible. Dr. Jeffrey Crawford and Dr. Susan Blackwell have done a great job



Bo and Addi, Easter 2007

monitoring my progress and have treated me so well," he says.

Other than a 'pesky' cough, Johnson says he is doing well. He remains stable and has never felt bad, which makes it all the more difficult to wake up every morning and remember that he has stage-4 lung cancer. "When I'm in the waiting room at Duke, everyone else is about 80 years old. The other patients think I work there. Even they can't believe I'm a patient," says Johnson. So far he has responded well to the treatment. During chemo he has gained weight even when the doctors told him he should expect to lose weight, and he hasn't felt sick like most chemo patients. He's even been known to take his chemo treatment in the morning and that night show up on the softball fields.

Since 2006, Addi's Cure has raised close to \$100,000, with donations from people in more than 26 states. In February, the Johnson's held their first fundraising event for Addi's Cure, a dinner at Mia Familia in Charlotte. The event, a four-course meal for \$50 a person, was expected to bring in \$5,000. With more than 180 people in attendance, they

cleared a little over \$12,000 for the evening. Johnson says it was a huge success in creating awareness and raising money for the cause. They plan to hold two events per year, at the beginning and end of the year. Addi's Cure is also currently accepting recipes for a cookbook, Christi's idea to not only raise additional funds, but build up her repertoire of healthy dishes she can prepare to make sure Bo eats right. Recipes can be submitted on their Addi's Cure website, and funds from cookbook sales will benefit the organization and its mission.

In college, Johnson served Sigma Nu as Lieutenant Commander for his chapter. When asked about the influence the Fraternity has had on his life, he responded, "When they say you make lifelong friends, it's not a joke. It really is the reality." It's true for Johnson in that during his first years out of college, he hired his peers to work for his insurance and financial services marketing company. Nine out of the 20 were Fraternity brothers. Today, with 62 employees, there are still nine Sigma Nus who work with him every day. "College was great, but it wasn't because of college, it was because of Sigma Nu," Johnson explains.

If Addi's Cure can reach the \$1 million mark, Johnson hopes that progress towards that goal will make all the difference in whether or not daddies like him will have the chance to one day walk their little girls down the aisle. When he was diagnosed in May 2006, the doctors said he could expect to live 4-6 months without treatment. Now, over a year later, the doctors won't update his prognosis because his progress is too unclear at this time. So, although, according to them, he's living on borrowed time, Johnson isn't about to let it stop him from making the most of every day he has with his beautiful wife and daughter. 🌸

<http://www.addiscure.org>

To learn more about Addi's Cure