



Newsletter

Edition 47 | Summer – Autumn 2022

Sophia Cotroneo committed to participating in the Great Ocean Road Half Marathon in May 2021 to raise funds for Breast Cancer Trials. This is her family's story.

"My mum was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004 when my brother Louis was 16 and I was 14.

She had a lumpectomy and a solid dose of radiotherapy in Wagga Wagga, two hours away from home in Griffith where dad and I remained and five hours away from Louis at boarding school in Melbourne. She smashed it, got better, got back to work and we carried on.

In 2010 on her five-year check-up (we're ready to be in the clear at this point yeah?) mum was diagnosed with a new primary cancer in her other breast. Rude right? This diagnosis called for more surgery and more aggressive treatment. Mum slogged her way through chemo in Griffith, had a bilateral mastectomy and continued to work at the local hospital and support our family.

Since then, things have been pretty cool. Louis moved to Germany, I remained in Melbourne and mum and dad live a solid life in Griffith with a ripper community.

But in January 2021 we found out mum's breast cancer, which had seemingly laid dormant for 16 and 11 years respectively, had metastasised to her bones and here we are now.

Mum's undergoing treatment, still working and still supporting our family.



Sophia celebrating with Carli after crossing the finish line.

I decided I needed to do something, and running a half marathon seemed easy in comparison to what mum's been through. I reached out to my friends and community with this message:

'Every bit helps – with more research we can have better treatment and outcomes for people with breast cancer. Mum's current treatment is vastly different to what she endured the last time she went through this. We owe this to trials and research.

I can't stress this enough – please help me, help them and hopefully one day less families will go through what we're going through'."

- Sophia

After months of gruelling training, Sophia Cotroneo felt unstoppable, but a small tear in her plantar fasciitis stopped her in her tracks.

Heartbroken, but buoyed by gratitude, Sophia watched as her friend Carli crossed the finish line in her place at the Great Ocean Road Half Marathon, in honour of her courageous mum.

In just a few short months, Sophia raised just over \$14,000 thanks to the support of her amazing friends, family and community. Congratulations and thank you Sophia for not only supporting your mum, but for wanting to help other women and their families too.



Sophia pictured with her mum.

Chair's update

It is with great pleasure that I write to you as the new Board Chair of Breast Cancer Trials replacing Professor Bruce Mann who has completed his term and is now our Director of Research.

I have been a researcher with Breast Cancer Trials for 14 years and it's a great honour and privilege to lead this internationally renowned research organisation and to work with you to save and protect the lives of our loved ones.

For many of us, the start of any new year is a time to set goals and hopes for the year ahead. As a research organisation, this is certainly true too. We have set some ambitious goals this year in our pursuit of innovative and diverse research to develop new and better treatments for every person affected by breast cancer.

Recently we sought your help to open the OPTIMA clinical trial to women in Australia. This international research is being conducted in several countries and the results may give thousands of Australian women with hormone-receptor positive breast cancer the option of safely avoiding chemotherapy without compromising their survival - and without the potential side effects. Because of you, we now have the funds needed to get this trial started. Thank you.

And in more good news, we plan to commence a further three new clinical trials in 2022, two of which are international collaborative efforts. Each of them

will address significant areas of patient need and are only possible because of you and other funding partners. I look forward to keeping you informed about them throughout the year.

National and international collaboration is key in breast cancer clinical trials research. By working with other clinical trials groups internationally we are pooling our resources, our knowledge and our efforts. This means we avoid duplication and identify breakthroughs more quickly. Which is why we were very excited that our EXPERT clinical trial was recently opened internationally for patient recruitment.

Sophia's mum's story is a reminder that whilst significant progress has been made, we must do more to ensure that every person can get back to their lives after breast cancer, free of side-effects and free of recurrence.

It is a privilege to share this journey with you and I am humbled by your generosity and commitment. I look forward to the year ahead and what we can achieve together.

Sunst Laplan

Professor Sunil Lakhani Board Chair, **Breast Cancer Trials (BCT)**



IN MEMORIAM

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We gratefully acknowledge gifts received in memory of:

Mrs Joyce Morton Mrs Diane Mulcahy Ms Dee Neagle Mrs Sui Ng Mrs Tracy Nicholls Miss Kaia Nielsen Mrs Heather O'Donnell Mrs Tanya Osland Mrs Joan Parr Mrs Sandra Perry **Miss Jane Peterson** Mrs Heather Pezely Mrs Jen Pierce Mrs Dipa Prakash Mrs Kim Prime Mrs Sylvia Prisk Mrs Beverly Pryke Mrs Niareen Pursell Mrs Galina Rabinovich Mrs Cynthia Rego Miss Susan Riddell Miss Tracy Riddell Mrs Mary Roberts Mrs Eliza Catherine Robertson Mr Dale Rohe Mrs Marie Rowland

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The gift of giving

Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who gave so generously to our Christmas Appeal!

We're excited to let you know that you have donated the first \$267,000 needed to open the OPTIMA clinical trial in Australia.

The outcomes from this clinical trial could give thousands of Australian women with hormonereceptor positive breast cancer the option of safely avoiding chemotherapy without compromise to their survival – and without the significant side effects that come with it.

Malea, pictured with her family, was 40 years old when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She inspired many people to help find better, kinder ways to survive breast cancer.

We received many beautiful, inspiring and thoughtful messages sharing what you're grateful for in the lead up to Christmas. Here are just some of them.

I am grateful for the care my daughter is receiving as she has stage 4 breast cancer. **– Barbara**

I am grateful that my beloved sister survived a very aggressive breast cancer 14 years ago. Even though she lives on another continent, I am grateful that we will share our "growing old" years together. – **Caren**

Grateful that you are trying to help people. I lost my grandmother and mother to breast cancer and my younger sister was caught in time, at age 40. She was so lucky. – **Patty**

I am always grateful for my good health, my good friends, my family, my ability to go for long walks and when I come home I am greeted by a beautiful cat that loves me. Perhaps it is because we are the same age. – **Monika**

I am grateful for researchers, clinicians and patients having the courage and generosity to test out new approaches to de-escalate breast cancer treatment. – Jolyn



I am grateful for a loving, devoted husband and a wonderful family. I am also very thankful we have so many brilliant researchers working so hard to help people like Malea. Keep up the wonderful work! – Jan

I am grateful to be healthy four years after my breast cancer diagnosis. I have seen my daughter marry and welcomed my first grandchild. – **Nicole**

I'm grateful to have had a good life, free of major illnesses. I hope that my small donation will give hope and wellness to those less fortunate than myself. Thinking of you all. – **Anne**

I'm grateful for the wonderful advances made in the treatments for breast cancer and I sincerely hope that this work will continue. – **Annette**

BEQUESTS

We gratefully acknowledge bequests received from the following supporters and offer our condolences to their families:

Mr Norman David Campbell

Ms Audrey Jean Farmer

Mr Allan Rowling

Mrs Pamela Dorothy Walker

Research update

We recently sat down with Dr Nick Zdenkowski, a Medical Oncologist and Medical Advisor at Breast Cancer Trials, and asked the following three questions we thought you'd like to know.

What is Breast Cancer Trials working on?

Thanks to our generous supporters, we are always working on several important research areas which address patient needs. We have seen international research that promises to be a game-changer through the addition of immunotherapy to standard treatment for early-stage and metastatic breast cancer.

This is particularly true for the high-risk 'triplenegative' breast cancer subtype, which has previously lacked a 'target' for treatment and therefore had a particularly poor prognosis. Our Neo-N clinical trial aims to find out if we can give an immunotherapy drug with chemotherapy to harness a person's own immune system against their cancer and spare them from needing some of the harsher chemotherapy that would usually be used. It is a neoadjuvant trial, meaning that these patients with early-stage breast cancer are given chemotherapy before they have surgery to remove their cancer.

Another fascinating clinical trial is BRCA-P, which aims to find out if we can prevent breast cancer from occurring in the first place in women at the highest risk because they have the BRCA1 gene mutation. This international trial, co-led by one of our Breast Cancer Trials researchers, is repurposing a drug called denosumab that is widely used for osteoporosis, and we have strong scientific research that indicates it may stop pre-cancerous cells in their tracks.

Of course, the good prognosis for many people who are diagnosed with breast cancer today is due to the numerous clinical trials like this that BCT researchers, doctors, clinical trial participants and supporters have contributed to. Ongoing research is needed to stop breast cancer from recurring, to maintain good quality of life post treatment and to prolong life.

What recent developments have been made?

New and practice-changing breast cancer treatments have certainly come about over the past few years.

One new development is the use of tumour genomic testing in some breast cancer patients to see if they need chemotherapy and who can be reliably spared from that treatment and its short and long-term side effects.

Breast Cancer Trials is leveraging that technology in our EXPERT clinical trial to find out if some patients with early-stage breast cancer can be spared from the radiotherapy that would usually be prescribed



Dr Nicholas Zdenkowski BCT Researcher and Medical Oncologist

after breast-conserving surgery. And our new OPTIMA clinical trial will look at other patient groups who may also be spared chemotherapy without compromise to their survival.

More patients are having chemotherapy before surgery for early-stage breast cancer, rather than the traditional approach of surgery first and then chemotherapy. Having chemotherapy first allows us to understand how well the cancer has responded to treatment and to tailor that treatment further, giving more or different treatments if needed, or less if not needed.

A breakthrough has been seen for those with poor prognosis breast cancer where the cancer did not shrink with chemotherapy given before surgery, by giving additional chemotherapy after surgery. This has led to more lives saved. It can get complicated for patients which is why I have worked with Breast Cancer Trials to develop an online patient support and education tool for women with early-stage breast cancer considering chemotherapy before their surgery (see next article).

The standard of care has changed for women with hormone-sensitive metastatic breast cancer with the availability of a new type of drug called a CDK4/6 inhibitor. Metastatic breast cancer is incurable, and these patients often receive chemotherapy treatment for the short time they may have to live. Now with this new type of drug, many can hope to 'live' with the disease and enjoy years with good quality of life. These drugs are now routinely prescribed to Australian patients with hormone-sensitive metastatic breast cancer because of clinical trials that Breast Cancer Trials has conducted.

There are new medications that clinical trials have shown to be beneficial, that are now going through the official approvals and reimbursement processes before being available in Australia for patients.

How do breakthroughs get to patients?

It takes many years between the discovery of a new medication and it being available for routine use for patients. It is very important to ensure that any new treatment (or an existing treatment used in a different way) is safe and effective before it is released. First, it must be tested in the laboratory and then it will move through phases of clinical trials with increasing numbers of patients to demonstrate safety and then effectiveness.

Along the way, many treatments do not get past those steps, despite great promise. Stories in the media about drug discovery in a laboratory can give a sense of excitement, tinged by frustration by the realisation that it will be years before a specialist like an Oncologist can prescribe it, if it manages to get that far.

It is the responsibility of researchers to only bring those treatments that have strong evidence of a benefit through to routine clinical care for patients. Official recommendation requires the agreement of experts in the field, along with the government Therapeutic Goods Administration.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme is there to make the best drugs affordable to the average Australian.

New tool to empower women in treatment decisions

For many women recently diagnosed with breast cancer, the treatment process can be overwhelming and stressful. In certain situations, doctors may offer treatment with chemotherapy or hormonal treatment before surgery to the breast and lymph nodes. This is called neoadjuvant treatment (treatment before surgery).

Breast Cancer Trials has developed a **Neoadjuvant Patient Decision Aid** to help women recently diagnosed with breast cancer decide, if offered this treatment option, whether it is the right treatment choice for them.

Women can access the Decision Aid either in print format or via an online tool.

The information provided is tailored to each breast cancer patient and factors in what type of breast cancer they have been diagnosed with. The decision aid is not intended to change a patient's mind about their treatment, rather to present an evidence-based view of their options and ensure their treatment choice is aligned with their individual circumstance. It informs breast cancer patients about their options for the timing of their treatment and surgery, why you might choose to have treatment before surgery and the pros and cons of having surgery first.

This resource was developed using the research findings from the DOMINO clinical trial. Created by a team of experts led by Breast Cancer Trials Medical Advisor, researcher and medical oncologist, Dr Nick Zdenkowski, the Decision Aid and the DOMINO trial were made possible thanks to our generous supporters and a grant from the HCF Foundation. The online version was supported by an educational grant from Roche.

"Our research has shown that breast cancer patients want more information and involvement in their decisions about treatment. This resource has been created to support shared decision making between patients and their doctors and treatment teams.

We have found that patients who use the Neoadjuvant Patient Decision Aid have decreased anxiety about their treatment choice, feel more confident in their treatment knowledge and feel more in control of their treatment moving forward.

We hope that all early-stage breast cancer patients who are considering neoadjuvant therapy will access this online resource and feel in control of their treatment," said Dr Zdenkowski.

Consumers who have experienced breast cancer were an important part of developing this resource, ensuring all information and language used was patient appropriate and easily understood.



Leslie Gilham Chair of the BCT Consumer Advisory Panel

Chair of the Breast Cancer Trials Consumer Advisory Panel and former breast cancer patient, Mrs Leslie Gilham, said this resource will be invaluable for women recently diagnosed with breast cancer.

"We are proud to have been a part of this important project, providing a breast cancer patient's perspective and representing those in the community regarding the information and resources they are given.

The online Neoadjuvant Patient Decision Aid helps to empower women early on in their treatment journey, through educating them on their treatment choices, dependent on their breast cancer type.

It will inform and give confidence to women who may be unsure about the best treatment decision for them. We hope every woman recently diagnosed with early breast cancer who has been offered neoadjuvant therapy, will have access to this tool," said Mrs Gilham.

To access the Neoadjuvant Patient Decision Aid, visit: www.myneoguide.com



That's a wrap for 2021!

Our 2021 **3** *Course Challenge* was held late last year and we are thrilled with the support from our wonderful community of chefs. Thanks to them over \$165,000 was raised!

This unique fundraising initiative challenged people to cook a three-course meal, host a dinner party and ask their friends and family to support them by donating to breast cancer research.

Hosts were supported by Masterchef alumni Sarah Todd (pictured top left) in a special, online cooking class. Sarah's own mum Lorraine was diagnosed with breast cancer 13 years ago.

Here are some of the wonderful culinary creations and special dinner party moments.



25 years of giving

This year we have many wonderful supporters who will reach a very significant milestone – 25 years of consecutive support for Breast Cancer Trials. We talked with Mrs Jan Robertson recently about the motivations behind her long-term commitment to our research program.

"My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and died 71 years ago when I was just four years old. She wasn't given a lot of information and following a mastectomy she was basically told that nothing more could be done.

My first diagnosis of breast cancer came in 1987 when I was 41 with three teenage sons.

It was a grade 3 adenocarcinoma, and the treatment was a lumpectomy followed by six weeks of radiotherapy. I recall Tamoxifen was mentioned at the time as a future treatment option but it wasn't available as it was still in the testing phase.

After 25 years of regular check-ups, in 2012 I was diagnosed with a hormone-sensitive, HER2 negative breast cancer in the same breast. I was told I would require a mastectomy because of the previous treatment I had received to that breast. After my mastectomy I was put on a five-year course of tamoxifen. I was also tested for the BRCA gene because my mother and aunt had died of breast cancer, but my result was negative.

Treatment of early stage breast cancer is important to me personally and I would encourage awareness and early testing.

I also feel that treatment for advanced and metastatic breast cancer is very important too. I would like to see more prevention options made available for all types of breast cancer which in turn will improve the quality of life for anyone diagnosed with breast cancer.

The stories shared by Breast Cancer Trials help you to relate, especially when you've experienced breast cancer yourself, and make you aware that breast cancer can happen to anyone.

I know my support is just one drop in the bucket, but every drop counts. I have granddaughters and I want my support to help protect them.

My hope is that my support of clinical trials research will provide better outcomes for all types of breast cancer and that more tailored treatment options will be available in the future." – Jan

Supporters in action

Shave for Shelly

Last year, Josh Cappiello created 'Shave for Shelly' in honour of his beautiful mum, Michelle (Shelly – pictured in pink) who was diagnosed with grade three, triple negative breast cancer in May 2021.

Her diagnosis came as a complete shock for Shelly and all her loved ones.

Josh said "Anyone that knows my mum would say she is the most loving, caring and compassionate person who would do anything for anyone."

Held in early December last year, 21 of their amazing friends and family either shaved, cut or coloured their hair to support Shelly and raise funds for Breast Cancer Trials. An amazing \$18,400 was raised!

Thank you to everyone involved.





Windaroo Lakes Golf Club, QLD.



Yarrawonga Mulwala Golf Club Resort, NSW.



Pacific Harbour Golf & Country Club, NSW.

Tee Off for Breast Cancer Trials

Many putters weren't able to see much action last year due to the various lock downs throughout Australia.

However, our amazing Tee Off community still managed to raise over \$180,000 and we're thrilled that they're back in full swing and already registering their 2022 Tee Off events.

Are you a member of a golf club and would like to combine your love of golf with a commitment to breast cancer trials research? We'd love to hear from you!

You can register your Tee Off event by visiting www.breastcancertrials.org.au. Alternatively, please contact us at teeoffenquiries@bctrials.org.au or on 1800 423 444.

Cupcakes anyone?

How amazing do these cupcakes look?! Almost too good to eat!

The wonderful Chris and his team from Sliver and Bite had these for sale during the month of October to help support research to identify new and improved treatments for breast cancer.

We just love seeing creative and unique ways to fundraise!

For more ways to fundraise, visit www.breastcancertrials.org.au





The perfect diary for every woman

Thank you to everyone who has purchased a copy of our 2022 Australian Women's Health Diary (even Santa helped)!

There are still copies available and special prices in place for our wonderful supporters when you make a donation online to our January Appeal.

Check out your unique website link on your donation form, or buy through our merchandise page at www.breastcancertrials.org.au or call 1800 423 444.



"I am forever grateful..."

Mrs Vilma White made her first donation to Breast Cancer Trials in 2014. We were very grateful when she also advised in 2016 that she had chosen to leave a gift to Breast Cancer Trials in her Will.

"It's now just over 20 years since I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was detected via a screening mammogram and I had no symptoms.

I'm forever grateful that it was picked up early, and I urge all

Remembering Breast Cancer

Trials in your Will ensures that

the special commitment you have

If you would like information about

to save lives from breast cancer

continue beyond your lifetime.

leaving a gift in your Will, please

slip or contact Cheryl our Special

tick the box on your donation

Gifts Officer for a confidential

discussion on 1800 423 444.

today, is a legacy which will

women to have regular screening mammograms. I am still having them every two years and I'm now 89.

I feel very lucky that I am healthy and breast cancer free since.

I hope that my bequest will help clinical trials research to keep improving the treatment of breast cancer for anyone diagnosed today or in the future. And my family are very supportive of my decision."



– Vilma

To leave a gift in your Will, the following wording should be used:

"I (your name) give to Breast Cancer Trials:

- the residue of my estate, or
- _____% of my estate, or
- the lump sum of \$_____, or
- my property known as _____ [e.g., real estate, art works, shares, units or other securities in listed companies].

to be applied for general purposes by Breast Cancer Trials as determined by its directors. I declare that the receipt of an authorised officer of Breast Cancer Trials will be a sufficient discharge to my executors who will not be bound to see the application of this gift."

Editorial Information

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