



Mario Muniz
and Family

Courage

Our Role Model

Mario Muniz

Mario Muniz is living proof that if you keep fighting your cancer, there is always hope.

Mario, 54, an administrator who operates Kids First Learning Center, a state-funded preschool program for low-income children, has faced stomach cancer for seven years.

"In April of 1999, I was diagnosed with a gastric stromal tumor, a type of cancer that has the propensity to recur," Mario says. "At that time, the only medical intervention was surgery. Even though I had several successful surgeries, the tumors kept coming back, every time larger than the time before. Worse, they kept spreading throughout my body."

Mario and his wife and children are extremely close. They all work together, and they enjoy family time together. His son, Gustavo, 19, calls his father courageous and strong; "He takes it a day at a time," Gustavo says. Mario's daughter, Bianca, says, "My dad's so strong. He's my role model."

Mario says he draws strength and hope from his medical team. "I have had complete trust in my medical team. Dr. Ucar told me, when the cancer came back last year, that we needed to try things and go places where others have never gone. 'Will you come with me?' he asked. 'Absolutely,' I said."

"I have been very fortunate to be in the right place, at the right time, for these treatments," Mario says. "There is always something happening, a new treatment, something to try."

"I don't even think of my doctors as my medical team any more. I think of them as an extended family. When you are fighting this disease, you can feel alone. But you are not. Reach out."

by Kalust Ucar, MD

Mario Muniz was 46 when he started bleeding internally from a stomach tumor. Test on the tumor showed that Mr. Muniz had a rare aggressive cancer called gastrointestinal stromal tumor, also known as GIST.

After a complete surgical removal of this tumor in 1999, Mario did well for about two years. But in 2001, the cancer had resurfaced, requiring a second operation. And two years later, it came back again, more aggressively this time, invading the liver and abdomen.

"At the time, this type of cancer could only be treated with surgery," says Dr. Kalust Ucar. "No chemotherapy, no radiation therapy, no medications had any efficacy against a tumor of this type. Under these desperate conditions, the patient was referred to me."

At that time, we were testing a medicine named Gleevec® as a treatment for leukemia, and there were indications that it could help patients like Mr. Muniz whose gastrointestinal tumors could no longer be treated with surgery. It worked remarkably well for him. The tumors in his abdomen and liver disappeared completely.

But by February 2006, it was clear that the Gleevec® alone was not enough. Mario suffered from rapid weight loss, internal bleeding, abdominal pains, nausea and vomiting. A new medication called Sutent® had shown some promise for patients like Mr. Muniz, and it helped him briefly. But by July, it was clear that this treatment was not working either.

"For lack of any other treatment options, we decided to combine the two medications, which had never been done before to our knowledge," Dr. Ucar says. "Within two months, Mr. Muniz's condition improved dramatically. All masses in his abdomen could no longer be palpated. Mario has returned to work full-time. He is pain-free and fully functional."



Gustavo and Bianca



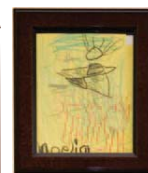
Mario's wife Blanca



Children's art from Kids First Learning Center



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Gastro Intestinal Stromal Tumor (GIST)

