Cancer Health 25: Lisa Simms Booth

Becoming a patient advocate during her mom's ovarian cancer journey led to her life's work to improve the cancer experience.

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The Cancer Health 25 is an annual list that honors individuals who have made a difference in the lives of people with cancer. This year's theme is quality of life. To see the full list, click here.

As executive director of the Smith Center for Healing and the Arts in Washington, DC, since 2019, Lisa Simms Booth, 55, is continuing a lifelong mission to empower patients and make the cancer journey more humane and patient-centered.

Booth already had deep roots in community activism and social justice when, in 2003, she started working at FasterCures, a center of the Milken Institute that focuses on overcoming the systemic barriers to faster discovery of better treatments and cures for diseases, including cancer.

That was the year her mission became personal. She found herself unwittingly becoming a patient advocate when her mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Navigating her mother's complex

eight-year illness and subsequent death drove her to commit to improving this experience for other families experiencing cancer. She spent 14 years at FasterCures, creating programs to make the system work better for patients.

She then joined the Biden Cancer Initiative, serving as senior director of patient and public engagement, helping to define the organization's advocacy outreach and collaboration strategies. She served as the staff lead for its Patient Navigation Working Group, which investigated ways to make patient navigation more accessible to cancer patients.

Today, at the Smith Center for Healing and the Arts, Booth continues to advocate for cancer patients and their families. The center develops and promotes healing practices that explore physical, emotional and mental resources that lead to life-affirming changes.

The Smith Center has been a leading exemplar for a whole-person-care approach to cancer since 1996. Founded by artist Barbara Smith Coleman after a life-transforming experience at a residential program for people living with cancer in Bristol, England, the center's integrative healing practices use art to support coping and a personal sense of well-being. Its empowering retreats and programs for adults living with cancer and their caregivers include yoga and stress reduction, creative expression, nutrition classes, lectures, support programs and patient navigation in integrative oncology care. With initiatives such as its Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, the Smith Center has become a leader in the nationwide movement to promote the use of the arts in healing.

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