Cowboys Owner Jerry Jones Says He Beat Stage IV Cancer Thanks to a Clinical Trial

Breaking a 15-year silence on his skin cancer diagnosis, Jerry Jones says he took an experimental checkpoint inhibitor, a type of immunotherapy.

August 27, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones revealed for the first time that in 2010 he was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer and that an immunotherapy clinical trial saved his life, according to The Associated Press (AP).

In the Netflix documentary series America's Team: The Gamble and His Cowboys, Jones, 82, shared that he was diagnosed with melanoma, a skin cancer, in June 2010 and that the cancer metastasized to other parts of his body. Over the next 10 years, he underwent two surgeries on his lung and two on his lymph nodes and participated in an immunotherapy clinical trial.

"Well, you don't like to think about your mortality, but I was so fortunate to have some great people that sent me in the right direction," Jones told the Dallas News, according to the AP. "I got to be part of a trial that was propitious. It really worked."

Unlike traditional chemotherapy, which directly kills cancer cells along with fast-growing healthy cells, immunotherapy is more targeted. Not only does immunotherapy enhance the body's immune system but it also enables the immune system to find and attack the cancer cells that often escape its detection.

Jones's clinical trial involved a form of immunotherapy known as checkpoint inhibitors, which are monoclonal antibodies (lab-made antibodies that target foreign substances). These antibodies restore the ability of T cells—naturally occurring white blood cells produced in bone marrow—to recognize and destroy malignant cells.

Jones said his clinical trial included a PD-1 checkpoint inhibitor. “It really, really, really worked,” the legendary team owner said. This type of treatment affects the ability of checkpoint proteins on T cells to turn an immune response on or off.

Although it is unclear when Jones enrolled in the trial, several checkpoint inhibitors have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration to target different checkpoint proteins, including PD-1, PD-L1, CTLA-4 and LAG-3. For example, Keytruda (pembrolizumab) and Opdivo (nivolumab) are PD-1 inhibitors, while Imfinzi (durvalumab) and Tecentriq (atezolizumab) are PD-L1 inhibitors.

Keytruda and Opdivo can be used to treat several types of cancer, including:

- Melanoma;
- Certain breast cancers;
- Hodgkin lymphoma;
- Non-small-cell lung cancer;
- Kidney cancer;
- Head and neck cancers.

To learn more about checkpoint inhibitors and other similar treatments, see Cancer Health’s Basics on Immunotherapy.

First-year Cowboys coach Brian Schottenheimer, 51, called Jones’s experience with cancer an “amazing story” and praised him for going public with his diagnosis, according to the AP.

“I’m glad that Jerry shared it, just because I think it gives people hope,” he said. “It gives people the strength to say…‘Hey, you can beat this.’”

Check out “Melanoma Clinical Trials to Watch: Summer 2025” to learn about the future of several immunotherapies that were pioneered in melanoma and are now being used or tested in more than 30 types of other cancers.

To read more, click #Checkpoint Inhibitor or #Immunotherapy. There, you’ll see headlines such as “Patients’ Own Autoantibodies May Hold Key to Boosting Cancer Immunotherapy Response,” “Most

Advanced Melanoma Patients Who Received Immunotherapy Before Surgery Remain Disease Free 4 Years Later" and "Radiation Therapy Overcomes Immunotherapy Resistance in Some Cancers."

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