Ex-CEO of YouTube Shares Last Message About Lung Cancer

Before Susan Wojcicki, who never smoked, was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2022 she actively supported cancer research.

November 27, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Weeks before she died of non-small-cell lung cancer on August 9, former YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki penned a message to inspire hope and encourage awareness for others living with cancer. It was published in a YouTube blog post on November 25 to coincide with Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

"At the end of 2022, I was diagnosed with lung cancer," Wojcicki, 56, wrote in the YouTube blog. "I had almost no symptoms and was running a few miles a day at the time. I had never smoked so I was totally shocked with this diagnosis."

She also shared what she was learning about the disease and whom it affects. "Although lung cancer overall is decreasing because of declines in tobacco use, lung cancer among people who have never smoked has been rising significantly, and two-thirds of people diagnosed with lung cancer with no smoking history are women," Wojcicki wrote.

After her diagnosis, Wojcicki resigned as CEO of YouTube to focus on her health and family.

"I was able to live an almost normal life, thanks to modern medicine," she wrote.

Wojcicki and her husband, Dennis Troper, actively supported cancer research long before her diagnosis. In her message, the tech pioneer advocated for increasing funding for cancer research and improving awareness for patients, including education about early detection and treatment options. Following her diagnosis, the couple donated millions of dollars for "early detection research, new immunotherapy options…and fundamental research to better understand the mechanisms and science behind the cancers."

In the United States, about 234,580 people will have been diagnosed with lung cancer by the end of this year, according to the American Cancer Society. Lung cancer accounts for about one in five of all cancer deaths, and more people die of lung cancer annually than colon, breast and prostate cancer combined.

Non-small-cell lung cancer is the most common type of lung cancer, accounting for about 85% of diagnosed lung cancer cases each year. It is often diagnosed late because of its slow progression. In fact, about 40% of cases will have spread beyond the lungs by the time it is diagnosed, according to Yale Medicine.

Smoking cigarettes is the leading risk factor for lung cancer. In addition, inhaling secondhand smoke can also cause lung cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 7,300 people who never smoked, like Wojcicki, die of lung cancer due to secondhand smoke each year.

After her diagnosis, Wojcicki learned that lung cancer research is significantly underfunded. She noted that lung cancer received less research funding per death ($4,438) from the National Institutes of Health compared with breast ($19,869), prostate ($9,135), colorectal ($7,565) and pancreatic ($5,932) cancer.

“I plan to continue to spend my time and resources investing in future cures for cancer. Especially lung cancer,” she wrote.

Before she became YouTube’s CEO in 2014, Wojcicki was one of 16 employees at Google in 1999 where she wound up becoming the company’s marketing executive. After resigning from YouTube, Wojcicki remained on the boards of several organizations and nonprofits, including Room to Read and the Environmental Defense Fund.

“For two years, she fought cancer the same way she lived the rest of her life—with hope, a curiosity to learn, and a determination to scale research efforts that could save lives,” current YouTube CEO Neal Mohan wrote in an introduction to the blog post.

Wojcicki concluded: “Having cancer hasn’t been easy. As a person I have changed a lot, and probably the most important lesson I have learned is just to focus and enjoy the present! Life is unpredictable for everyone, with many unknowns, but there is a lot of beauty in everyday life. My goals going forward are to enjoy the present as much as possible and fight for better understanding and cures for this disease.”

Troper announced his wife's death via social media.

"My beloved wife of 26 years and mother to our five children left us today after two years of living with non-small-cell lung cancer," he wrote. "Susan was not just my best friend and partner in life, but a brilliant mind, a loving mother, and a dear friend to many. Her impact on our family and the world was immeasurable. We are heartbroken but grateful for the time we had with her."

In related Cancer Health news, our spring 2024 cover story, "The Young Ambassador for Women With Lung Cancer," highlights Sydney Barned, MD, a never smoker who was diagnosed with Stage IV non-small-cell lung cancer at age 33.

For more, click #Lung Cancer. There, you'll find headlines such as "How Injured Lung Cells Are Reprogrammed to Drive Lung Cancer," "Internet Access Linked to Earlier Stage Non-Small-Cell Lung Cancer Diagnosis and Care" and "Timing Matters When Adding Immunotherapy to Chemoradiation for Patients With Small-Cell Lung Cancer."

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