

Grateful Blood Cancer Patient Supports Colorado University Cancer Center Research

When you learn about advances in cancer care and research, “you want to be part of it,” says frequent donor David Evans, who has an uncommon form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

December 12, 2024 By University of Colorado Cancer Center and Mark Harden

David Evans has been a frequent donor to cancer research since long before he faced his own cancer diagnosis. “I’ve seen what cancer can do to people and families,” he says.

Evans, 73, is a longtime wealth management professional in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Married to his wife, Sandra, for 45 years, with two children, Evans says there was no previous history of cancer in his family, “but my wife and I have had friends with cancer. Cancer doesn’t have an age bracket. Obviously, older people get more cases, but middle-aged people get cancer, and children get cancer, too. It affects everyone, the people with cancer and the people around them.”



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Evans has given regularly for more than 30 years to the Cancer League of Colorado, a philanthropic partner of the [University of Colorado Cancer Center](#) supporting its research programs, especially in [blood cancers](#). He has contributed both in the form of direct donations and through the Cancer League's fundraising events. And for the past five years, he also has donated directly to the University of Colorado to support research into cancer and other diseases at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus.

→ [‘Inner Fire’ Fuels a Young Scientist’s Blood Cancer Research](#)

“My wife and I have given to a lot of causes,” he says. “There are so many good causes out there, from veterans to children, homelessness to environmental. There’s not enough money to go around, so we’ve selected those causes that are most meaningful to us. And now, our personal experience these last few years has really keyed us in on cancer.”

Blood count points to problems

Evans’ own cancer journey began in September 2019, when he began to notice “pretty mild” symptoms. He went to see a doctor he calls “probably one of the best internists I could go to,” [Ronald Colson](#), MD, an assistant professor of [internal medicine](#) who practices at UCHesth University of Colorado Hospital and the Sissel Family Endowed Distinguished Clinician Chair.

“I told Dr. Colson I was tired, but otherwise feeling OK. I had a complete physical. The blood work came back with a high white cell count, but everything else looked good. He thought I might have been fighting something, and said that if anything changed, I should get back to him.”

→ [Family Support and CU Cancer Center Treatment Helped Codie Mendez Survive Her Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia](#)

Then in May 2020, Evans one day found “I was getting exhausted and could barely finish playing 18 holes of golf.” He came back to see Colson for blood tests.

“As I was getting in the car to go home, I got a call from him, and he said, ‘Have you left the complex yet? You’ve got to go over to oncology and blood disorders as soon as possible. Your blood is totally whacked out.’ I had so many white cells they didn’t know what to do with them, and they thought it could be life threatening.”

A warning about Googling

The next day, Evans and his wife went to see [William Robinson](#), MD, PhD, a CU Cancer Center

member and professor of [medical oncology](#) with decades of clinical experience and the Monroe and Rella Rifkin Endowed Chair in Cancer Research. “I give credit to Dr. Colson for maybe saving my life because he got me to Dr. Robinson right away,” Evans says.

Doctors at first suspected that Evans might have chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), the most common chronic [leukemia](#) in adults. They later determined he had mantle cell lymphoma, an uncommon and often aggressive form of [non-Hodgkin lymphoma](#) that can be difficult to diagnose. Mantle cell lymphoma was first identified in 1992.

→ [Football Coordinator With Leukemia Finds Winning Team at CU Cancer Center](#)

Robinson urged Evans to begin treatment as soon as possible. “I was tired but didn’t feel like my life was in danger,” Evans says. “But apparently, all the organs in my body were enlarged, and Dr. Robinson said if I didn’t start treatment, I might have three months to live. He also said, ‘If you Google this, ignore everything that’s older than six months ago because things are advancing so quickly.’ He was right. I Googled it and everything came up saying I had six to 18 months to live—and that was with treatment.”

‘I couldn’t be happier’

In June 2020, Robinson began treating Evans with bendamustine, a type of chemotherapy, and rituximab, a targeted-therapy drug. “Dr. Robinson said, ‘We’re not going to check you into the hospital, but you’re going to feel like you live out here for the next six months at least.’”

The following February, Evans transitioned to acalabrutinib (Calquence), a new drug for blood cancers. By July 2021, Evans says he was showing no signs of cancer, and Robinson took him off the drug. In mid-2022, Evans went back to his doctors feeling lightheaded. He got a blood transfusion requiring two units and started a new treatment combination of acalabrutinib and six months of infusions of obinutuzumab, an antibody therapy. He remains on acalabrutinib today.

→ [More information on ways to support the CU Cancer Center.](#)

Today, Evans says, “I feel good, and I couldn’t be happier. Through the work of Dr. Robinson and CU Anschutz, I’ve been able to lead a normal life going on five years now.” He’s working out with a trainer three days a week, playing golf, and fishing in the mountains.

Recently he recorded a happy birthday greeting for Robinson on a video.

“Dr. Robinson has been unbelievable. What helped me out so much during the treatment was the confidence Dr. Robinson had, the support from my family and friends, and getting up and going to work every day. And he’s been special to my family. When I was diagnosed, he said, ‘I’d like to call your kids if you want me to.’” The kids were concerned, and he had a great conversation with them.”

He also says his nurses have been “caring and thoughtful. Everyone at UCHHealth has been unbelievable. Every experience I’ve had at CU Anschutz has been incredible.”

Supporting research advancements

Evans believes the sort of cancer research that he and his wife have supported for years has helped him to survive. Evans says he has met [Richard Schulick](#), MD, MBA, director of the CU Cancer Center. “I’ve heard him speak at functions, and he’s just so invigorating and so excited about what he’s doing. When you hear about all the things that are happening in cancer research and treatment, you want to be part of it and do a donation, help out, whatever you can do.”

Now, Evans says he and his wife have designated support for research at the CU Cancer Center in their estate plans.

→ [‘Cancer Affects Everybody’: Longtime CU Cancer Center Benefactors Support Rising Stars](#)

“Dr. Robinson has said that things are changing so rapidly that if one thing doesn’t work, there’ll be something else soon. Working with Dr. Robinson through the last four years and seeing the advancements they’re making in medicine and treatments is unbelievable. For my wife and me, it comes down to helping in any way we can to figure out a cure or a better treatment that can make a difference in so many people’s lives. It would be our hope and dream to be part of something that can affect hundreds of thousands of people.”

Asked what he would tell a friend seeking cancer treatment about the CU Cancer Center, Evans says: “I would tell them they’re as good as you can find anywhere. I had the opportunity, through some connections, to go to some of the top cancer treatment centers in the country. But after dealing with Dr. Robinson and meeting the staff, I thought, ‘I’m with the best. Why would I go anywhere else?’”

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/grateful-blood-cancer-patient-supports-colorado-university-cancer-center-research-lymphoma>