Highlights From the 2019 Scientific Retreat

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"Rusty shouldn't have survived a year after being diagnosed with Stage 4 melanoma in 2006," began Heather Davis at the opening session of the 2019 MRA Scientific Retreat. The room, bursting with melanoma researchers, industry partners, survivors, and patients was instantly rapt.

"He shouldn't have survived his first clinical trial, second, or fifth. But he did. His life included a series of uncanny miracles — of radical scientific innovations that appeared at the exact moment when they could be applied to him — affording him year-after-year of life that without he would never have known," she continued.

Heather then shared that Rusty Cline's string of miracles ended after 12 years. Twelve years that he arguably should never have had.

She told the crowd that Rusty's life was a testament to the incredible progress of melanoma research and the contributions of people in this very room. That his death was a reminder that more — much more — remains to be done.

Heather's call to action was the perfect start to the 2019 MRA Scientific Retreat. Over the course of three days more than 300 people from across the melanoma research ecosystem would gather together at this invitation-only event to exchange ideas, report on scientific progress, celebrate achievements, and mourn the losses.

Over the course of three days, attendees discussed everything from new treatment approaches such as RNA-based vaccines, strategies to fight back against treatment resistance, and hurdles to testing neo-adjuvant therapies in melanoma.

Investigators also shared progress made and challenges encountered when harnessing new technology to further their research goals, be it advancing prevention or developing new treatments. From artificial intelligence, innovative imaging strategies, and altogether new models for studying melanoma — presenters and participants alike explored the deep collaborations within and across specialties focused on melanoma.

“Please know, above all else, that there is hope in every single thing you do,” Heather told the crowd. “Every hour logged, experiment failed, trial endured, datum analyzed, adverse event suffered, is an act of composition: ultimately leading to another joyous story of hope that will be told, another living song that will be sung.”

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