

A Clinical Trial That is the Right Fit



Connecting Patients to the Latest Therapies Close to Home

Sometimes a clinical trial for a promising new treatment comes along at exactly the right time for a person in need. That was certainly the case for Serafina Banich, 91, of Boulder, Colorado. Serafina has a rare blood cancer, Waldenstrom Macroglobulinemia (WM), a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. When traditional therapies were beginning to fail her, her physician—David Andorsky, MD, of Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers in Boulder—was able to identify a US Oncology Research clinical trial for a new drug that seemed a great fit. Today Serafina is doing better, thanks to a pioneering team of doctors and hematology researchers.

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Serafina's Story: Finding Hope

In the mid-1990s Serafina was diagnosed with WM, and for years she lived without symptoms and did not require treatment. However, in 2012 she suffered a stroke that was possibly related to her blood cancer, and her New York doctor started her on a treatment regimen. After moving to Colorado, Serafina continued on her prescribed therapy under the care of Dr. Andorsky and the team at Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers. Yet in the summer of 2015, she experienced increased anemia and fatigue; adding to the concern, her daughter felt that Serafina was “slowing down” cognitively. Dr. Andorsky stopped her treatment and her anemia improved, though she continued to slowly decline.

Meanwhile, a new clinical trial was available through US Oncology Research that focused on an investigational drug for the treatment of WM, and Serafina was interested in trying it. Through US Oncology Research's unique STAR (Selected Trial for Accelerated Rollout) model, Dr. Andorsky was able to quickly enroll Serafina in the clinical trial. “We opened the trial in Boulder as soon as the study was available,” said Dr. Andorsky. “She started on treatment in August, and she has had a good partial response—about a 70% reduction in her M-spike. Most notably, her daughter feels that she is much more ‘with it’ and that the treatment has ‘given her back years’ in terms of her function.”

A Stellar Model for Cancer Care

Serafina's clinical trial is one of about 50 STAR trials that US Oncology Research has introduced since the program's inception four years ago. With its focus on the recruitment of difficult-to-find patients, the STAR model is particularly beneficial to patients with rare cancers, as well as those with more common indications. When a potential STAR trial patient has been identified, the participating practice is trained and the study is opened within a two-week timeframe at the location where the patient is expected to be seen.

Because of the STAR model, Serafina was able to enroll into a clinical trial at her community cancer center when she needed it most, rather than having to travel to find one. “Serafina's story shows that there is so much value in having novel treatment options for WM, especially when they're available close to home,” said Carl Harrington, President of the International Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Foundation, a non-profit organization that offers educational and support services to WM patients and caregivers and funds WM research. “As a Waldenstrom patient myself, I understand how clinical trials like these can be life-changing. It's encouraging to see that there are programs that allow patients with rare diseases to enroll quickly into clinical trials located right in their own communities.” Best of all, added Dr. Andorsky, “The treatment has had basically zero side effects and really does appear to have improved her quality of life.”

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