



Dana-Farber
Cancer Institute



Name: Erica Bernstein

Role on PFAC: Adult PFAC Co-Chair

What do/did you do for work (or hobby or passion)?

Prior to cancer and its complications, I worked as a physician-scientist specializing in Geriatrics and researching immunology of aging.

What brought you to the Patient and Family Advisory Council?

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006 while working as a Geriatrician. I've been a Dana-Farber patient since that time, first sharing care at BMC, then as a participant in a Dana-Farber clinical trial, and ultimately as a long-term patient and participant in many of the survivorship programs available through the Zakim Center. Due to collateral damage from my cancer and its treatment, I had to go out on long-term disability in 2009. While leaving work has been a source of profound grief, it has given me space to volunteer. Since my diagnosis, I have served in many capacities as a patient advocate and educator on breast cancer bulletin boards, support groups for young women with breast cancer, and wellness programs for survivors.

Why is the work the council does so important to you, and what skills do you bring?

As a physician-scientist, I'm keenly aware of how my training and skills improved my own access to care, and I want to ensure that this insight is available to all people who have to navigate cancer care. Prior to joining PFAC in 2016, most of my advocacy work was direct counseling/coaching. PFAC allows me to expand my impact through helping evaluate policy and quality of care issues across Dana-Farber. I bring to PFAC my physician-scientist skills, my experience with many areas of Dana-Farber care (acute treatment, clinical trials, chronic treatment, survivorship care), and my previous experience in wellness program development and fundraising. I care deeply about equal access to quality health care and centering the patient/family experience in cancer care operations.

What are your hobbies and interests?

I helped create a nonprofit dragon boat wellness program for survivors, Wellness Warriors (www.wellnesswarriorsboston.org), and I sit on the board of WeCanRow-Boston, a rowing program for breast cancer survivors. In addition to paddling and rowing, I love to hike and have participated in many outdoor adventures with First Descents, an adventure program for young adults with cancer. I have a fully organic vegetable raised-bed garden in the Fenway Victory Gardens that is my "healing garden," started after I had to leave work due to my complications from cancer. I taught myself everything – from organic gardening practices to building elevated self-watering raised beds – from the internet, and I now provide all the produce for my extended family.