

Cancer doesn't quit.

Neither does the Executive Council of the Susan F. Smith Center for Women's Cancers at Dana-Farber.

Since its founding in 2002, the Executive Council has remained steadfast in its support of the Center's groundbreaking research in breast and gynecologic cancers. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Executive Council is amplifying its message to women in Boston, throughout the country and the world to increase awareness of the promise and world-class expertise on latest innovations in research and patient care at Dana-Farber.

"It is hard to believe that just decades ago, women's cancers was not a common term, and the word cancer was whispered," says Debbie First, an Executive Council Co-Chair and Dana-Farber Trustee. A 40-year ovarian cancer survivor, First was treated at Dana-Farber long before the Susan F. Smith Center opened in 2011 as a world leader in the fight to end women's cancers. "The Executive Council was founded by women to educate, advocate and raise funds specifically for research and treatment of women's cancers."

The Council is hundreds of women business and community leaders who come together annually with leading researchers and clinicians from the Susan F. Smith Center to learn and raise critical funds. For the past 18 years, the council has hosted an annual breakfast and luncheon to highlight the cutting-edge science, new discoveries and novel treatments that are revolutionizing women's cancer care. Women have come year after year to learn about new treatments that are saving or extending lives, to have conversations with Dana-Farber faculty and to support the Smith Center.

"This is the most exciting forum that I participate in," says Judy Garber, MD, MPH, the Susan F. Smith Chair and Chief, Division for Cancer Genetics and Prevention. "This is a group of can-do accomplished women who give their time and money to something they really believe in. The event has a level of excitement that truly energizes all of us researchers in the room."

Since 2002, the contributions raised by the Executive Council have totaled more than \$18 million. These donations have provided critical funding for the Susan F. Smith Center. Funds raised by the Executive Council currently support four innovation grants, each worth \$75,000, awarded for early-stage high-risk/high-reward breast or gynecologic cancer research that is not eligible for government funding. It has also provided funding for the creation of a vital breast-tissue specimen bank, an invaluable resource for researchers.

"The Executive Council has really pioneered a partnership approach to their funding," Garber says. "They have worked with the breast cancer program leadership to figure out where they would have the most impact, and they have found a way to deliver on their promises."

That collaborative spirit is a hallmark of the Executive Council. Its co-chairs bring their professional expertise and personal experiences to create dynamic and forward-looking forums each year. "We co-chairs are all so passionately committed to this cause," says Co-Chair Meredith Beaton-Starr, who has participated on the Executive Council since its beginning. "We're motivated to make things better for the next patient, the next generation."

Covid 19 caused many events to be canceled. But the co-Chairs knew that cancer does not wait. And so they created an innovative online presentation, "Revolutionary Developments in Women's Cancers," that will stream at noon Eastern on Friday Sept. 25. "The beauty of this event is that women can attend

this event wherever they are in the world,” Beaton-Starr says. “We’re able to share the depth and breadth of expertise of the Susan F. Smith Center with an audience far beyond what we’ve ever had before.”

In the information-packed presentation, experts will share advances on the first personalized ovarian cancer vaccine trial. They will discuss the impressive progress being made with HER2+ breast cancer and a novel targeted therapy trial in endometrial cancer. Ursula Matulonis, MD, Chief, Division of Gynecologic Oncology, and Eric P. Winer, MD, Chief, Division of Breast Oncology, will answer questions in a live Q&A. And five patients will share their journeys. “These inspiring stories from patients and their families give us hope,” First says. “What you learn in this one hour could change your life.”

“Cancer doesn’t quit,” Beaton-Starr adds. “In a time of COVID, our role is more important than ever to continue this support of the doctors and researchers of the Susan F. Smith Cancer Center.”