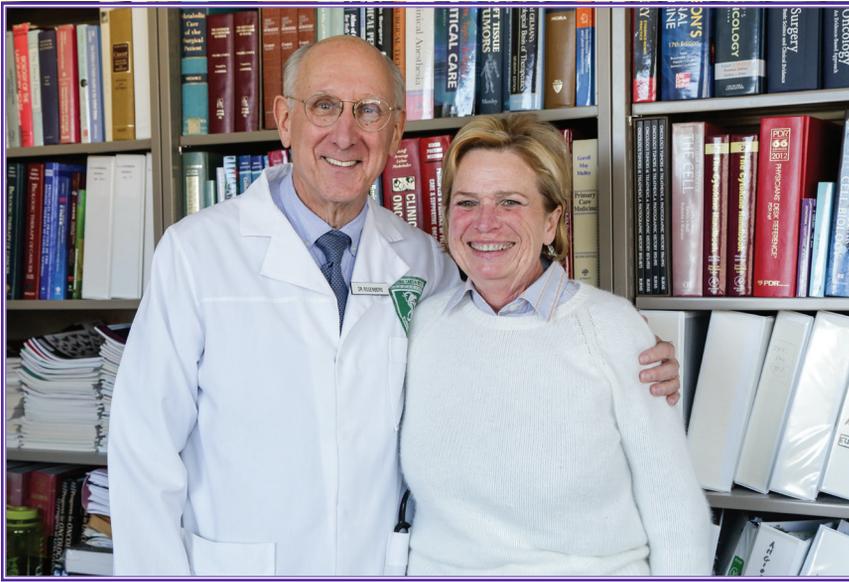


Immunotherapy's First Cure

(Photo: B. Brantson)



Steven Rosenberg, M.D., Ph.D., and former patient Linda Taylor, who has been in complete cancer remission for 30 years.

Linda Taylor was first diagnosed with melanoma in 1982. Taylor was a self-described hard-charging, ambitious, “workaholic” officer in the Navy at the time. After surgery to remove her tumors and being told she had a 50-50 chance of survival, Taylor took an assignment to Guam as a Flag Secretary. When several small nodules appeared on her arm some weeks later, the Admiral sent Linda to Bethesda Naval Hospital, which is now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. “They told me that there wasn’t much they could do for melanoma once it hits the system,” said Taylor. “They thought maybe I had 17 months, but they didn’t give me any real hope.”

The Hospital is just across the street from the NIH Campus in Bethesda and during her stay, a doctor visiting from NCI reviewed her case and recommended an experimental treatment. She was treated under two protocols, one of which involved a month-long hospital stay. When neither treatment was successful, one of the doctors suggested a new protocol, using interleukin-2 (IL-2) to treat

advanced metastatic cancer, run by Steven Rosenberg, M.D., Ph.D.

“I have to be honest, I was pretty reluctant to go through with another experimental treatment,” said Taylor. “The last two had been very draining and I felt like my quality of life had become nonexistent. But my family encouraged me to talk to Dr. Rosenberg. He was a very unassuming, low-key guy. He told me that he had not had a tremendous amount of success so far with the new therapy, but had great hope. He was very convincing.”

During her month-long treatment, Taylor was followed closely by Rosenberg’s team, including Stephen Ettinghausen, M.D., and Research Nurse Claudia Seipp. Taylor experienced severe chills, gained a lot of weight, and often had trouble breathing because of fluid build-up in her lungs. “I did well until the middle of December, but then I stopped breathing,” said Taylor. “Steven intubated me and eventually, I pulled right back out of it. I had one chipped tooth from the intubation and then the treatment was over.” Everyone was surprised when follow-up biopsies

revealed the complete death and disappearance of all the tumors.

“When I went into remission, nobody really thought it was going to last. They just didn’t know what it meant. So we just waited and watched,” said Taylor. The Navy had put her on the Temporary Disability Retirement List (TDRL) and stamped “Death Imminent” on her personnel file. After five years on TDRL, she returned as a Commander and was eventually promoted to Captain. She became Dean of Administration at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. Taylor retired in 2001.

Taylor’s story is described in much more detail in Dr. Rosenberg’s book *The Transformed Cell*, where she is identified as Linda Granger. “When he first published the results of the IL-2 trial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, all of sudden he was everywhere. His picture was on magazines. It took him by surprise,” said Taylor. “I was still on disability retirement from the Navy, and I wasn’t too keen on having a lot of visibility. So he changed my name in the book to protect my identity.”

“They say if you stay in remission for about five years, that’s a good rule of thumb that it won’t recur,” said Taylor. “But when you do an experimental protocol, they make it very clear you are breaking new ground and there are no rules. When I went to visit Dr. Rosenberg last December, he told me that he has never had a patient have a recurrence after 5 years’ complete remission. So he said, ‘I think you’re good to go.’ After 30 years, it’s still very emotional.”

During Taylor’s recent visit with Rosenberg, they were filmed for an upcoming PBS documentary on the history of cancer. Overseen by Ken Burns, the three-part series titled, *The Story of Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies*, is scheduled to premiere in spring 2015.