



# A View of Cancer from Both Sides

## PATIENT STORY

By Ryan Daugherty

**Rob Tenery, M.D., 76, of Waxahachie, Texas, has devoted his life to helping others – a trait that runs in the family.**

The son and grandson of general surgeons, “Robbie” first started making rounds with his father at the local hospital when he was 5 years old and began working in the laboratory when he was 9. Just three years later, he began helping take X-rays.

“Those were my summer jobs; I was always involved in medicine one way or the other,” he says. “I can’t be more thankful for the influence my father and grandfather had on me.”

Dr. Tenery attended medical school at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, which led him to UT Southwestern Medical Center, where he completed his internship at Parkland Memorial Hospital. He returned to UT Southwestern in 1974 and completed his residency in ophthalmology.

Dr. Tenery has practiced as an ophthalmologist at Medical City Dallas Hospital for 45 years; during that time, he also taught at UT Southwestern as a clinical professor.

In 2009 things suddenly changed when Dr. Tenery found himself in the role of the patient. During preparation for a mitral valve repair, a chest X-ray revealed a spot on his lung. In 2011, he was diagnosed with epithelial growth factor receptor-positive lung cancer and underwent surgery to have the upper lobe of his left lung removed.

Two years later, a biopsy revealed that cancer had returned in his rib. His doctor referred him to David Gerber, M.D., Professor of Internal Medicine at UT Southwestern. Dr. Gerber told Dr. Tenery that his chest cancer was an uncommon type that was thought to have a genetic component, and he started treating Dr. Tenery with erlotinib (Tarceva),

an oral chemotherapy drug. Tarceva controlled the disease for another two-and-a-half years.

“I felt that Dr. Gerber was not only going to take care of me, but that he and his staff genuinely cared about me, too,” says Dr. Tenery. “I can’t begin to tell you how much of a difference that made.”

In October 2017, a PET scan revealed four metastatic lesions: two on his ribs, one on his scapula, and one on his cervical spine. A thoracic multidisciplinary tumor board discussed his case and recommended that he be evaluated by Hak Choy, M.D., FASTRO, Professor and Chairman of Radiation Oncology.

Very few physicians have Dr. Choy’s expertise in treating lung cancer with chemotactic-radiation therapy. Under his leadership, UT Southwestern has quickly become one of the leading institutions in the country in treating patients with advanced radiation oncology technology and techniques, including SBRT. These innovations improve the quality of care for patients like Dr. Tenery because planning margins can be reduced and surrounding healthy tissues can be spared even as the treatment dose is escalated.

**“When I met with Dr. Choy, he gave me hope,” says Dr. Tenery. “He said, ‘I think we can get it.’ That was all I needed to hear from such a knowledgeable and optimistic physician.”**

In that initial meeting with Dr. Choy, it was decided that the four lesions would be treated with 13 sessions of palliative radiation over a three-week period.

Dr. Tenery responded well to the radiation treatments and to a change from oral to IV chemotherapy. However, in November of 2018,



a scan showed a new lesion on his right adrenal gland. To treat this new tumor, he received five more radiation treatments over a two-week period, which he tolerated extremely well.

Moving forward, Dr. Tenery will continue to see Dr. Gerber monthly for chemotherapy, and Dr. Choy will treat future metastatic lesions as they arise. Thanks to innovations in radiation oncology technology and techniques, these lesions can be targeted precisely with high doses of radiation, while surrounding tissues are spared. Also, advances in technology and techniques will improve patients' quality of life.

"With modern technology and treatments available, we can improve quality of life and offer patients hope," says Dr. Choy. "It's incredible to see that Dr. Tenery is doing well 10 years after his diagnosis. This is a testament to our Department's success and the field's innovations."

Although the road hasn't always been easy, Dr.

Tenery has maintained a positive outlook along the way. The aspects of his life that have helped the most with his cancer treatment are his faith in God, the prayers of friends and prayer groups, and the support of his family.

"The process has been easier knowing that prayers are heard, having my fears pushed aside, and knowing His hand is always there for me," he says. "And, of course, Janet, my wife of 54 years, as well as my family, and especially our grandson, Mason, have supported and encouraged me."

Dr. Tenery also hasn't lost passion for his work. He explains that treating patients, as well as being one, brings him to a closer understanding that we are all in this battle together, alongside God and the good doctors at UT Southwestern.

"I don't know that I can say I'm a better doctor, but fighting cancer has made me a much more compassionate one," he says.