

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

RUN FOR THE RIBBONS RAISES AWARENESS OF GYNECOLOGIC CANCERS

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JACKSON, Miss. – Brandon resident Debbie Gamblin had surgery a year ago in her quest to beat uterine cancer, the most common of all gynecologic malignancies.

Owner of a pet-sitting business for almost three decades, 60-year-old Gamblin continues treatments under the care of Dr. Mildred Ridgway, an assistant professor and physician in the University of Mississippi Medical Center's Division of Gynecologic Oncology.

"It makes a huge difference in your attitude when you know that the doctors and the nurses care so much about you," said Gamblin, who babysat Ridgway years ago through their families' friendship.

Gamblin has a vested interest in the success of the first annual Run for the Ribbons, a 5K race Sept. 27 on the UMMC campus to raise awareness for the five primary gynecological cancers: ovarian, uterine, cervical, vaginal and vulvar.

Sponsored by the Division of Gynecologic Oncology in UMMC's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the race is the first of its kind in the state, said Bethany Sabins, a family nurse practitioner in Ridgway's office and one of the event's organizers. Proceeds benefit the new Gynecologic Oncology Fund, which supports continuing education and personalized services to make patients more comfortable as they go through cancer treatment.

"I'm proud that we're doing this," Ridgway said of the race, which comes during Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month. "My hope is that we can create a fund to support patient education and care. There's so much that patients need where we could go above and beyond."

Race preregistration is \$25 and \$30 week of the race and includes a T-shirt. It's \$15 to purchase just a shirt. Runners check in from 7:30-8:30 a.m. at the University Pavilion; the run, which winds through the UMMC campus, starts at 9 a.m., and a 1-mile fun run is 10 a.m.

An awards ceremony follows the fun run. Overall male and female winners will be recognized, as will first- and second-place winners in the usual age group categories.

Rain or shine, the race will take place, Sabins said. But if dangerous severe weather conditions exist, she said, "all decisions regarding cancellation will be made on site on race day."

The statistics on gynecologic cancers are sobering. About 71,500 women in the United States are diagnosed with those cancers each year, and about 26,500 women die of them annually. This year alone, about 12,000 new cases of cervical cancer will be diagnosed, and 4,000 of those women are expected to die, the American Cancer Society says.

The numbers are much more deadly for ovarian cancer, which this year will strike an estimated 22,000 U.S. women. About 14,000 are expected to succumb to ovarian cancer this year, making it the deadliest cancer of the female reproductive system – and there’s no sufficient screening test for its early detection, medical experts say.

About 70 of Ridgway’s patients receive chemotherapy infusion treatments per month, and she sees another 100 per week in her clinic. Five to 10 of her patients on average are hospitalized each week at the Wiser Hospital for Women and Infants on the UMMC campus.

Those visiting her include Canton resident Yolanda Martin, 46, now free of uterine cancer diagnosed in 2010. Martin said it’s important that the race call attention to more obscure gynecologic cancers that often aren’t understood.

“This also pays homage to those who lost their lives to gynecologic cancers,” said Martin, employment coordinator for guardsmen and reservists in the Mississippi Military Department. “We’re standing on their shoulders.”

A race feature includes the optional purchase of balloons in memory of, or in honor of, a gynecologic cancer patient. They’re \$5 and will be in colors of the ribbons that represent the different forms of cancer. Call the Division of Gynecologic Oncology at 601-984-5320 to purchase, or go to active.com

Gamblin’s stamina isn’t high enough for her to physically tackle a 5K. Even so, she said, the Run for the Ribbons “encourages me to fight the fight.”

Martin, who now sees Ridgway every six months for checkups and is putting together a team of coworkers to take part in the race, isn’t leaving Gamblin behind.

“I’m going to have your race number written on me,” she told Gamblin recently when they visited Ridgway’s office. “I’ll do it for you.”

For more information, call (601) 984-5320 and press option 2, or visit <http://www.active.com/jackson-ms/running/distance-running-races/run-for-the-ribbons-5k-and-fun-run-2014> to register. Join the Run for the Ribbons Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/1498571463712254/?context=create&source=49>

Fast facts on gynecologic cancers:

Each year, about 71,500 U.S. women are diagnosed with a gynecological cancer.

The five primary cancers are vaginal, uterine, ovarian, cervical and vulvar.

About 26,500 women in this country will die from gynecological cancers this year.

The most deadly is ovarian, with 22,000 new cases in 2014 and 14,000 deaths.

African-Americans are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to die of a gynecological cancer.

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at (601) 984-1100 or click [here](#).