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July 18, 2014

Swim Across America means waves of support for fellows



Janel Jorgensen McArdle makes her leap (Rick Osterberg photo)

Eric Zhou, PhD, calls himself “an absolutely terrible swimmer,” so the Dana-Farber clinical psychology fellow is glad that he – and the many cancer patients he’s impacting through his research and clinical care – had stronger athletes stroking on their behalf last weekend.

As DFCI’s current Swim Across America (SAA) fellow, Zhou receives funding through proceeds generated by Boston-area SAA events during the year. This includes the 18th annual SAA–Boston Harbor 22-mile relay swim on July 11, and the 17th annual SAA–DCR Nantasket Beach one-mile and half-mile swims on July 12. Olympic swimmers,

including SAA President Janel Jorgensen McArdle, a 1988 Olympic Silver Medalist, partnered with and assisted approximately 150 participants who took on these challenging open-water events.

Zhou jokes that he would “never be able to keep up in the water,” but he credits fundraising swimmers for making his work possible. SAA events this year will mean approximately \$175,000 in critical pediatric cancer funding for the David B. Perini, Jr. Quality of Life Clinic at Dana-Farber, which in Zhou’s case means support for both his patient visits and research into insomnia in adolescent and young adult survivors, suicidal

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thoughts among prostate cancer survivors, and the management of sexual dysfunction in patients.

“What’s ideal about the Perini Clinic model is that patients can meet with their provider, and then see a psychologist within minutes if there are any psychosocial needs,” says Zhou, who addressed the Boston Harbor swimmers after they emerged from the chilly waters. “The opportunity to connect with a psychologist right away, and in the same clinic where they receive medical care, is invaluable, and the SAA fellowship makes that opportunity – and our research -- possible.”

Knowing where their money goes is important to swimmers, says McArdle, whose father, Erik Jorgensen, is a four-time cancer survivor treated at Dana-Farber back in the mid-1990s. His experience here played a role in McArdle leaving a successful career in the private business sector to take on her leadership role with non-profit SAA in 2005, and it’s a decision she has never regretted. The SAA fellowship program at Dana-Farber had started in 1997, and she has kept it going strong (see box for list of all fellows).

“The beauty of SAA is there is every level of swimmer out there, but cancer is always at the forefront,” says McArdle. “We made a conscious decision a while back that we would have the researchers we support come out to the events and meet the participants, so the swimmers could see exactly who – and how – they were helping.”

This is now the case in Boston and all 17 open-water swims and 100 pool swims that SAA holds from Boston to San Francisco each year to support cancer research, and the program continues to grow. On July 10

Swim Across America fellows at Dana-Farber

- ▶ 1997 – 1998: May Lin Tao, MD
- ▶ 1998 – 1999: Christopher Recklitis, PhD
- ▶ 1999 – 2001: Lisa Kenney, MD
- ▶ 2001 – 2002: Frederick D. Grant, MD
- ▶ 2002 – 2004: Sharon Bober, PhD
- ▶ 2006 – 2007: Ming Hui Chen, MD
- ▶ 2007 – 2009: Veronica Sanchez Varela, PhD
- ▶ 2009 – 2010: Lynda Vrooman, MD
- ▶ 2010 – 2012: Sara Barton, MD
- ▶ 2012 – Present: Eric Zhou, PhD

McArdle's seven-month-old twins, Erik and Ayden, were waiting at the dock when she finished her stint in the Boston Harbor swim, and she says they will be joining in the cold-water fun in a couple more years.

—[Saul Wisnia](#)



Janel Jorgensen McArdle (left) and her friend and fellow SAA participant, Coleen Lynch, relax after the Boston Harbor Swim with McArdle's twin boys. (Photo courtesy of Janel Jorgensen McArdle)