



A Breath of Hope

LUNG FOUNDATION

Malina D, wife and mother of three teenagers, was 43 years old when she was diagnosed with Stage 4 non-small cell lung cancer in 2021. It was a terrifying time for her family and even today, they have to continually redirect their fears and worries to remain positive and hopeful. Thanks to biomarker testing and the discovery that her cancer has a biomarker called EGFR Exon 19, she was able to begin a relatively new targeted therapy called Tagrisso (FDA approved in 2017). Since she began taking Tagrisso in 2021, her cancer has all but disappeared. The tumors in her brain, adrenal glands, spine, and lungs are gone and today she is left with one small spot that her team is watching.

Tagrisso is a type of cancer medicine called a tyrosine kinase inhibitor. It blocks the activity of EGFR, which normally controls growth and division of cells. In lung cancer cells, EGFR is often overactive, causing uncontrolled growth of cancer cells. By blocking EGFR, this medicine helps to reduce the growth and spread of the cancer.

Malina knows that lung cancer research receives fewer dollars per cancer death than other cancers and she is incredibly frustrated and disappointed about this fact. To drive change, she works with A Breath of Hope Lung Foundation to bring awareness to the inequities and gaps that are common in this cancer, but also to drive more research and new treatments.

Malina had no known risk factors for lung cancer, was dedicated to working out, golfed regularly, and ate well. She was a picture of health until January of 2021 when she started having symptoms that affected her everyday life ... a dry cough, a tickle in her lungs, trouble getting through her normal runs, and breathing issues that affected her ability to sleep at night. She assumed she was developing asthma, so she went to a local urgent care to find out that her left lung was full of fluid. Thus started the journey...

Malina asks herself why there is little to no lung screening available for the country's deadliest cancer—another inequity that doesn't make sense. "I get more reminder emails from my vet for my dog's ongoing care than I do about my own health. Why doesn't primary care educate patients about lung cancer in nonsmokers and why is it nearly impossible to receive preventative screening for lung cancer?" Malina asks. "In a perfect world, we would all receive our annual screening for lung cancer and like breast cancer, we would find it early when it is easier to beat. I plan to do everything I can to advocate for more lung cancer screening and broader eligibility, more disease awareness, and more research to change lung cancer outcomes."

In the meantime, Malina stays busy with activities that bring serenity and hope. She has recommitted to deepening her faith, spends time in nature, and surrounds herself with the people she loves most. She shared, "If there are any bright sides to a lung cancer diagnosis, it is learning to live fully in the present with a positive mental outlook."

