

Meet T.J. Sharpe

Meet Melanoma survivor TJ Sharpe in the first installment of his new blog series on Novartis.com.

By [T.J. Sharpe](#) | Feb 24, 2017



T.J. Sharpe, Melanoma survivor, Blogger & Cancer Advocate

Novartis has asked me to share my story here, relating to my ongoing battle with melanoma, and to share some of my experiences and physical, mental, and emotional hurdles that came hand in hand with managing a deadly disease.

In August of 2012, I checked into the local ER with a spiking fever... and left 16 days later with a Stage IV melanoma diagnosis. I was 37. My wife had given birth to our second child just weeks before. And now I was facing the biggest obstacle imaginable to me being a good Dad and supportive husband – remaining alive.

The treating oncologist told my wife Jen that he would be surprised if I “were still here in 2 years,” as he suggested standard of care chemotherapy. That was not good enough; 2 years barely gets little Tommy to remember his Daddy. We got 4 second opinions before finally settling on a clinical trial in the Tampa, Florida area. That trial failed, but 4 years later, after 2 clinical trials, 4 immunotherapies, and 6 surgeries, I am on the cusp of having a complete response. I remain on the second clinical trial by our home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

As I have gotten progressively better – my latest scans show stable disease in only 2 remaining spots – I have been fortunate to be able to reach out and help others. In the midst of the first trial, I was asked to contribute to the [Philly.com Health Section](#). That has opened up new avenues to fulfill one goal I set as I laid in that hospital bed in 2012: to make a difference in the lives of other patients. I expanded the blog to include cancer research and advocacy. I speak about my experiences on clinical trials and with immunotherapies. I even got the chance to moderate a Twitter chat with Troy Aikman and The University of Pennsylvania's Abramson Cancer Center for the [Melanoma Just Got Personal](#) awareness campaign.

The coming blog posts will mix personal experiences with cancer and melanoma-specific information. They will speak to the changes in cancer treatments on the horizon as targeted and immunotherapies become more widely approved, and true personalized medicine comes closer to fruition. It will talk about some of the impact that a cancer diagnosis will have on the patients – and their families. We'll break down the clinical trial process, and stress why they are so important for medical research and for patients who need all available

treatment options.

Novartis and I hope this series will be informative, authentic, and insightful – a real-life portrayal of the challenges faced during a fight for life. One in every 2 men and one in every 3 women in the United States will get cancer in their lifetime. It is going to happen to you or someone you care about. You don't need to know everything about cancer now, but it certainly will help to know where to find some basics relayed from someone who has walked a similar path.

This is the first installment in a series of blog posts authored by patient and advocate T.J. Sharpe for Novartis.com. Be sure to check back regularly for new installments in this series by T.J. Sharpe.

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