



**ADVANCING MORE BREAKTHROUGHS**

**TOGETHER**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2023**

**GRASPCANCER.ORG**

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# A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDERS

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**Dear Friend of GRASP,**

We founded GRASP to break down the barriers between cancer researchers and patient advocates, believing that real progress happens when these groups collaborate. In 2023, we continued building on that vision, creating meaningful collaboration and learning opportunities.

This year, we returned to in-person Poster Meetups at smaller, more intimate conferences, including the Metastatic Breast Cancer Research Conference in Park City, Utah and the Advanced Breast Cancer 7th International Consensus Conference in Lisbon, Portugal. These in-person connections are incredibly valuable, allowing advocates and researchers to interact directly, share experiences, and foster deeper collaboration.

GRASP also expanded its impact internationally. At the ESMO Breast meeting in Berlin, Germany, we had the privilege of chairing a session on patient inclusion in research, featuring scientists and advocates worldwide. This session demonstrated how GRASP strives to break down silos and create bidirectional learning opportunities between advocates and researchers.

Our GRASP Reception at SABCS 2023, which has become a staple of the conference, was a highlight of the year! These face-to-face interactions offer a unique opportunity for scientists and clinicians to connect informally with the community impacted by their work.

We also hosted several virtual Huddles, which include small group discussions between advocates and researchers to discuss key cancer research topics. These conversations reinforce the importance of ensuring patient experiences remain central to the research process.

As we reflect on the progress made, we're grateful to everyone who has supported us—whether by attending our Poster Walkthroughs and Meetups, participating in Huddles, or helping us spread our message. Your involvement fuels our efforts to drive meaningful change in cancer research.

Thank you for being a part of GRASP!

With warm regards,



**Christine Hodgdon**  
Co-Founder



**Julia Maués**  
Co-Founder



# MEET OUR TEAM



**Christine Hodgdon**  
Co-Founder



**Julia Maués**  
Co-Founder



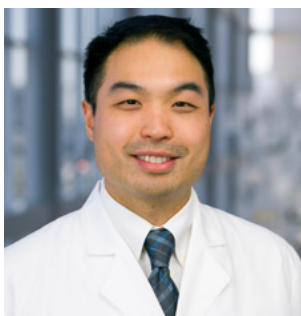
**Marlena Murphy**  
Program Manager

## GRASP BOARD OF ADVISORS



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**Beth Burnett**  
Past Chair,  
MBC Alliance



SCIENTIST

**Isaac Chan, M.D., Ph.D.**  
UT Southwestern



ADVOCATE

**Debbie Denardi**  
Board Member,  
305 Pink Pack



ADVOCATE

**Abigail Johnston, Esq.**  
Independent Patient  
Advocate



SCIENTIST

ADVOCATE

**Corrie Painter, Ph.D.**  
Precede Biosciences



SCIENTIST

**Hillary Andrews, Ph.D.**  
Policy Analyst, Friends of  
Cancer Research



ADVOCATE

**Jasmine Souers**  
CEO, The Missing Pink  
Breast Cancer Alliance



ADVOCATE

**Stephanie Walker**  
Independent Patient  
Advocate

# WHO WE ARE



## OUR MISSION

**Changing how we approach science, so we can change lives.**

Our patient-led programs connect and empower patients, clinicians, and researchers to exchange ideas and learn from each other – so we can drive more meaningful and fundable research and make faster progress to improve therapies that will end cancer.

## OUR PLEDGE

**Committing to an #InclusionPledge to eliminate barriers in cancer care.**

GRASP pledges not to participate in any advocacy initiatives – from panels and advisory boards to planning committees and programs – that fail to include the experience of people of color.



## OUR PROGRAMS

**Connecting advocates & cancer researchers to advance breakthroughs.**

As a diverse and growing network with a shared vision, we have both virtual and in-person programming that seeks to break through silos so patients, clinicians, and researchers can learn from each other.



### VIRTUAL LINKUPS

LOG ON & LEARN



**Poster Walkthroughs** – Virtual post-conference discussions about cancer research



**Huddles** – Freestanding interactive cancer research discussions



**Network** – Connections to our network of advocates & researchers



### IN-PERSON MEETUPS

EMPOWERING THROUGH EXCHANGE



**Poster Meetups** – In-person discussions about research at cancer conferences



coming soon

**Lab Meetups** – Patient advocate visits to cancer research labs



**Receptions** – Social gatherings between advocates & researchers



## A SPECIAL AWARD AT THE GRASP SABCS 2023 RECEPTION

The GRASP Reception at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS) remains a highlight and a meaningful opportunity for advocates, scientists, and clinicians to connect in person. This reception celebrates the relationships and collaborations forged through GRASP's mission while reflecting on its remarkable impact over the years.



This year's reception featured a milestone moment: the presentation of the **GRASP Luminary of Change Award** to Abigail Johnston. The GRASP team honored Abigail for her extraordinary advocacy, unwavering brilliance, and selfless contributions to the cancer community. Since GRASP's inception, Abigail has been a cornerstone of its success, serving as both a mentor and a member of the Board of Advisors.

Diagnosed with de novo stage IV metastatic breast cancer in 2017, Abigail has transformed her personal experience into a mission to amplify the patient voice in healthcare. Living in Florida with her family, she shares her insights and experiences through her blog, [No Half Measures](#), while mentoring with GRASP and advocating for systemic change. Her journey began unexpectedly at 38 when she discovered a lump while nursing her young sons—a moment that launched her on a profound path through treatment and advocacy. Abigail's dedication to ensuring patient perspectives are represented at every level of healthcare embodies the very spirit of GRASP.



The 2023 reception welcomed over **200 attendees**, including breast cancer advocates, scientists, and clinicians. More than a social gathering, the event reflects GRASP's mission for fostering true partnerships and collaboration. In this unique setting, every attendee – scientist or advocate – stands as an equal, united in the shared goal of advancing cancer research and care.

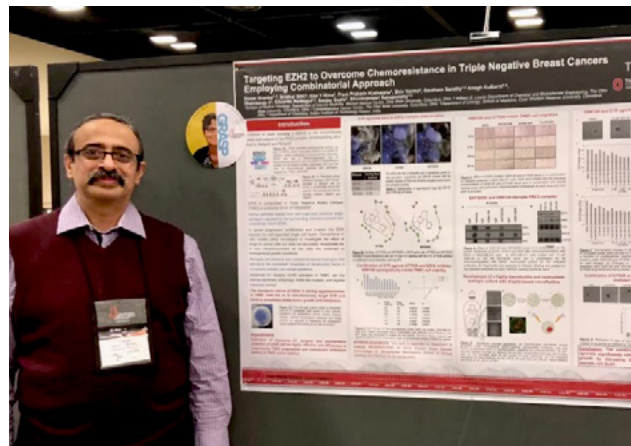


## HOW GRASP'S POSTER WALKTHROUGHS REKINDLED A SCIENTIST'S COMMITMENT TO CANCER RESEARCH

In a world where science often progresses in silos, GRASP brings together scientists and patient advocates for meaningful, bidirectional conversations. These are not just discussions about data—they're personal exchanges that bridge scientific discovery and the lived experience of cancer.

Dr. Eswar Shankar faced a profound loss with the passing of his wife to endometrial cancer. Her death deeply influenced his perspective and ignited a desire to honor her legacy through his work. Soon after her passing, GRASP selected his scientific poster for a discussion with patient advocates. He felt a deep appreciation for GRASP's emphasis on his work, which provided a significant motivational boost.

At the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS) Poster Walkthroughs, patient advocates engaged with Dr. Shankar and offered feedback that highlighted the real-world impact of his research.



Dr. Shankar's story reflects GRASP's core values—equity, inclusivity, and the transformative power of science. By creating a space for shared insight and lived experience, GRASP helps transform personal loss into purpose-driven progress.

***“Personally and professionally, the experience with GRASP reawakened my commitment to living with purpose, dedicating my research to the fight against cancer.”***

**DR. ESWAR SHANKAR**



# POSTER WALKTHROUGHS



**GRASP Poster Walkthroughs facilitate dynamic, virtual discussions through Zoom, where patient advocates and scientists review scientific posters directly after major cancer research conferences, fostering a deeper understanding and collaborative dialogue on groundbreaking research.**



Our Poster Walkthrough programs help advocates better understand the science behind the latest cancer research presented at scientific conferences, while also offering researchers the chance to hear from another group of experts—patients themselves. Each small group discussion matches a scientist with a mentor and five to six patient advocates to discuss and explore scientific posters being presented at cancer research conferences. In 2023, GRASP held Poster Walkthroughs virtually after three major cancer research conferences.

<b>BY THE NUMBERS</b>	<b>JUNE 2023</b> American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO®) Annual Meeting	<b>SEPTEMBER 2023</b> International Invasive Lobular Breast Cancer (ILC) Symposium	<b>DECEMBER 2023</b> San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS)
<b>ATTENDEES TOTAL</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>ADVOCATES</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>SCIENTISTS</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>54</b>



# POSTER MEETUPS



**After a long hiatus, GRASP resumed in-person poster discussions, rebranded as “Poster Meetups,” at select conferences. These face-to-face walkthroughs are invaluable, providing direct interaction between advocates and researchers, enhancing personal connections, and promoting stronger collaboration.**



Our Poster Meetups bring together small groups of advocates, researchers, and clinicians for a detailed in-person discussion of scientific posters at cancer research conferences, guided by an expert in the field. The interactive format fosters bidirectional learning, where researchers gain insights from the patient perspective, and advocates deepen their understanding of scientific concepts. These opportunities for engagement drive innovation in cancer research by keeping patient experiences at the forefront. In 2023, GRASP held in-person Poster Meetups at two cancer research conferences – the Metastasis Breast Cancer Research Conference (MBCRC) hosted by Theresa’s Research Foundation in Park City, Utah, and the Advanced Breast Cancer 7th International Consensus Conference (ABC7) in Lisbon, Portugal.





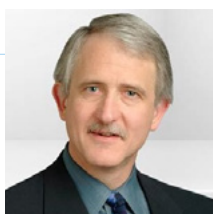
## SHAPING CANCER RESEARCH THROUGH PATIENT VOICES

GRASP Huddles are in-depth discussions centered on cancer research and patient experiences. Each Huddle brings together a researcher, a mentor, and five to six patient advocates from various experience levels to explore a specific research topic. In 2023, GRASP coordinated several Huddles which provided researchers with the patient perspective that helped shape their projects while keeping advocates informed about the latest advancements in cancer research.

### FEBRUARY 2023

#### George Thomas Budd, M.D.

Medical Doctor,  
Hematology and Medical  
Oncology, Cleveland Clinic



#### Justin Johnson, Ph.D.

Program Manager,  
Vincent Tuohy Laboratory,  
Cleveland Clinic Lerner  
Research Institute

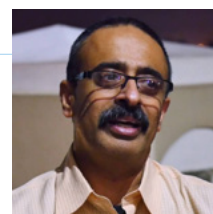


Dr. G. Thomas Budd, M.D. and Dr. Justin Johnson, Ph.D. provided us with the status and progress of the phase I trial of an alpha-lactalbumin vaccine in patients with operable triple negative breast cancer.

### APRIL 2023

#### Eswar Shankar, Ph.D.

Assistant Research Professor,  
Ohio State University  
Comprehensive Cancer Center



#### Vish Subramaniam, Ph.D.

Academy Professor and  
Professor Emeritus,  
Ohio State University (OSU)



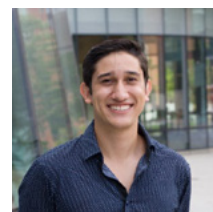
Dr. Eswar Shankar, Ph.D. and Dr. Vish Subramaniam, Ph.D. introduced us to a promising new non-invasive, non-pharmacological treatment for triple negative breast cancer using induced electric fields.

### MAY 2023

#### Xilal Y. Rima

Ph.D. Candidate, Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center

Xilal Y. Rima and Dr. Eswar Shankar discussed their proposal to combine D1R agonists with EZH2 inhibitors to make triple negative breast cancer treatments more effective and to advance this combination therapy to clinical trials.



**JULY 2023**

**Virginia Kaklamani, M.D.**

Professor of Medicine, UT Health San Antonio, MD Anderson Cancer Center

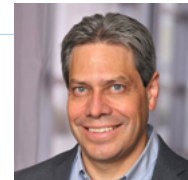


Dr. Kaklamani, M.D. discussed a new type of hormone therapy from the EMERALD trial called an oral SERD (selective estrogen receptor degrader) which improves outcomes in patients with hormone receptor positive (HR+) metastatic breast cancer (MBC).

**JULY 2023**

**Blake R. Peterson, Ph.D.**

Chair and Professor, Medicinal Chemistry and Pharmacognosy, Ohio State University



Dr. Blake Peterson, Ph.D. and Dr. Eswar Shankar, Ph.D. discussed their research to develop a new combination therapy that targets major oncoproteins to stop the metastasis of triple negative breast cancer.

**AUGUST 2023**

**Yan Zhan**

Ph.D. Candidate, Yale University School of Nursing



Yan Zhan met with patient advocates to get feedback on a survey to better understand how socioeconomic, clinical factors, and physical and psychological symptoms impact health-related quality of life for those diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer (MBC).

**DECEMBER 2023**

**Gitte Zels**

Ph.D. Candidate & Resident in Anatomic Pathology at KU Leuven



Gitte Zels introduced the post-mortem tissue donation program from the Laboratory for Translational Breast Cancer Research in Belgium, and highlighted its importance in advancing cancer research and uncovering the complexities of metastatic disease.



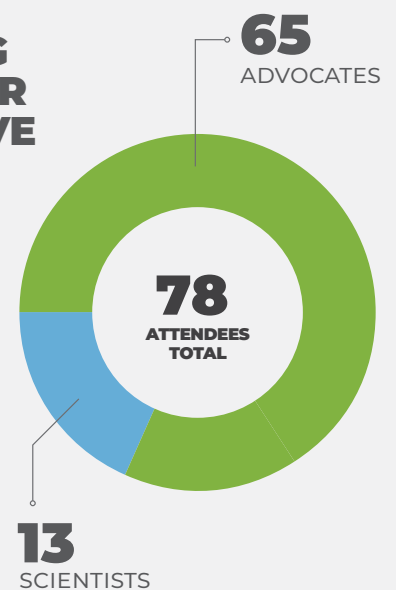
***GRASP stands out as a truly patient-centered organization that connects patients to scientists and clinicians in an excellent, interactive, learning environment.***

**JOAN MANCUSO**  
PATIENT ADVOCATE



**BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR PATIENT-INCLUSIVE RESEARCH**

Participation in GRASP Huddles almost doubled in 2023, laying the groundwork for ongoing collaborations that can support future cancer research projects and grant funding applications.





**MAY 2023**

**Berlin, Germany**

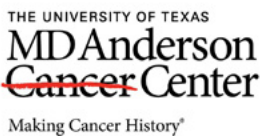
**European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) Breast Cancer Congress**

GRASP co-founders Julia Maués and Christine Hodgdon participated in ESMO Breast, an international event designed for researchers and clinicians focused on the latest innovations in breast cancer diagnostics, treatments, and care. The 2023 conference brought together over 4,000 participants, 81 speakers, and presented 273 abstracts across 33 sessions.

Christine and Julia organized a session on **Bringing the Patient Voice to Cancer Research**, highlighting the transformative role of research advocacy in cancer care. Julia chaired the session and emphasized the mutual benefits for both researchers and patients when advocates are involved early in the research process. She conveyed how patient advocates not only help humanize the research but also inspire researchers, educate the patient community, and ultimately make research more impactful and fundable. She urged researchers to engage with a diverse range of advocates, stressing the importance of bidirectional, meaningful interactions.

Christine delivered a powerful talk for this session on **How GRASP Drives Bidirectional Learning Between Patients and Researchers**. She addressed the barriers that both patients and researchers face in connecting with each other and emphasized how GRASP's programs are designed to overcome these challenges. Christine detailed GRASP's philosophy of fostering collaboration between patient advocates and researchers and shared success stories of how these interactions are breaking silos and advancing cancer research.





**JULY 2023**

## **MD Anderson Cancer Center's Advanced Breast Cancer (ABC) Clinic**

GRASP co-founder Christine Hodgdon was invited to speak on the weekly webinar, *The ABCs of Healthy Living in Challenging Times* about "How GRASP is Empowering Patients to Influence Research." This multidisciplinary weekly series focuses on health-related quality of life topics in patients living with advanced or metastatic breast cancer.



**JULY 2023**

## **Project Life Bootcamp**

Julia Maues participated in the virtual Project Life Bootcamp where she shared her personal journey of being diagnosed, how she found patient advocacy, and how crucial advocacy is in the cancer research process.



**2023**

## **Patient AI Rights Initiative The Light Collective and Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation**

As a 501c3, The Light Collective was founded by a team of patient activists, coders, health experts, and data journalists in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica data breach to represent the rights, interests, and voices of patient communities in healthcare technology. Our very own Marlena Murphy, GRASP Program Manager, worked on the Patient AI Rights Initiative, a patient-led project to establish clear rules and standards for health AI, ensuring that patient rights, privacy, and well-being are central. It emphasizes governance by patients, transparency in AI usage, and securing the benefits of AI for those most vulnerable to its risks.



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## RAISING AWARENESS OF THE POWER OF PATIENT-INCLUSIVE RESEARCH

As we move forward through 2024, we will continue to see more organizations recognizing the value of patient-inclusive research, and GRASP is expanding its network to support these efforts. We aim to continue to be actively involved in key conferences and meetings, fostering meaningful bi-directional conversations between researchers and patient advocates, while simultaneously expanding the types of programs and sessions we offer.

## LOOK FOR GRASP AT THESE UPCOMING MEETINGS

### FEBRUARY 2024 – SAN ANTONIO, TX

Advancing the Science of Cancer in Latinos  
Conference

Poster Meetup & Reception

### SEPTEMBER 2024 – LEUVEN, BELGIUM

International Invasive Lobular Breast Cancer (ILC)  
Symposium

Poster Meetup & Invited speakers

### JUNE 2024 – CHICAGO, IL

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO®)  
Annual Meeting

Poster Walkthrough

### DECEMBER 2024 – SAN ANTONIO, TX

San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS)

Poster Walkthrough, Reception, & Invited speakers

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## UPCOMING HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2024

### MARCH/APRIL 2024

Luminate Medical Huddles

Discussions between patients and a medical device company to gather patient insights on product designs that target hair loss and neuropathy.

### AUGUST 2024

National Cancer Institute (NCI) Junior Investigator (JI) Meeting

GRASP was invited to participate in the NCI-JI meeting which connects late-stage graduate students, postdocs, and early career faculty from diverse fields to focus on innovative cancer research.

### SEPTEMBER 2024

Breast International Group (BIG)-Patient partnership Initiative (PPI)

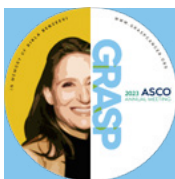
GRASP was invited to serve as members of the BIG-PPI and will participate in a workshop held in coordination with the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) Breast Cancer Congress in Barcelona, Spain.



## HONORING THE LEGACY AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF ESTEEMED COLLABORATORS

The emblems below were awarded to posters of distinction at conferences where GRASP held Poster Walkthroughs and Meetups in 2023. As we continue to make strides together in advancing cancer research, we pause to honor the advocates and colleagues who, sadly, are no longer with us. Their invaluable contributions to the patient-inclusive research movement will never be forgotten, and we remain committed to carrying forward their legacies as we work toward a future free of cancer.

### American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO®) 2023



Dikla Benzeevi



Lakesha Gordon



Flori Hendron



Lara McGregor



Silke Pflueger



Amanda Waddell  
Raffenaud

### International Invasive Lobular Breast Cancer (ILC) Symposium 2023



Meg Kotler



Leigh Pate



Elizabeth  
Viggiano

### San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS) 2023



Lisa Laudico



Anne Loeser



Rhonda Mullins



Anya Silver



Stacey Smith



Eileen Youtie

# FUNDERS & PARTNERS



## YOUR DEDICATION & GENEROSITY FUELS OUR MOVEMENT

GRASP programs and growth are made possible through the ongoing support of our funders and partners, who share our belief in the importance of patient-inclusive research in driving faster progress toward cancer cures.

## WITH THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS



## WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

- ABC Global Alliance
- American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO®)
- BreastCancer.org
- BreastCancerTrials.org
- Candel Therapeutics
- Chan Lab
- Chrysalis Initiative
- COR2ED
- European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO)
- Hope for OTHERS Tissue Donation Program
- International Invasive Lobular Breast Cancer (ILC) Symposium
- Johns Hopkins Medicine
- Lee/Oesterreich Laboratory
- Light Collective
- Living Beyond Breast Cancer
- MBCBrainMets.org
- Metastatic Breast Cancer Alliance
- Metastatic Breast Cancer Trial Search
- Missing Pink Breast Cancer Alliance
- Our MBC Life
- Patient-Centered Dosing Initiative
- PeerView
- Project Life
- Rising Tide® Foundation for Clinical Cancer Research
- San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS)
- Theresa's Research Foundation



# GET INVOLVED



## JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO ADVANCE MORE BREAKTHROUGHS

Not a GRASP member yet? Join us in the effort to break silos between the different groups involved in cancer research. By becoming part of our network, you'll gain access to upcoming events and opportunities to connect with researchers, advocates, and partner organizations in your areas of interest.

[Join Us](#)



Scan to Join Our Network

## SUPPORT GRASP'S MISSION

We rely on the generosity of our community and partners to continue providing valuable programs, fostering meaningful discussions, and supporting patient-centric research. Your donation helps us expand our reach and make a bigger impact. Every contribution counts in our shared mission to accelerate cancer breakthroughs.

[Donate Here](#)



Scan to Donate!



### GRASP Cancer

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GRASP is a program of Trailhead Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.