

Cancer Patients Sail the Soothing Seas

By Yadira Galindo | July 24, 2013

Under a cloud-covered sky, gentle winds pushed the 65-foot schooner, *JADA*, over the ruffled waters of San Diego Bay. For the boat's very special passengers – cancer patients and their caregivers – it was a moment of peace, exhilaration and recovery.



On this day, four patients from UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center and their guests took sail under the auspices of Sailing Heals, a non-profit organization that provides recuperative sea-going adventures. The one-and-a-half hour outing provided a spectacular waterside view of San Diego's downtown skyline and bay activities. It was sponsored by Officine Panerai – La Jolla, in collaboration with Moores Cancer Center, one of only 41 National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the country.

"Sailing is slow, but I loved it," said Robert Garbowski, a colorectal cancer patient who shared the experience with his wife Paulette.

"It's an amazing experience," added Paulette. "The serene environment is a great break from everything in our lives."

And that's the goal. Sailing Heals' mission is to give cancer patients a brief escape from the rigors of everyday life, complete with hors d'oeuvres, spirits and quality time with their guests. This was the first sailing trip for the organization in San Diego; the organizers hope to do it again.

Aside from the scenic wonders, sailing aboard the *JADA* offered a chance to meet other cancer patients. Sandra Dillon was a world traveler until she was diagnosed with myelofibrosis, a type of

chronic leukemia. She had never been on a sailboat. She loved the experience. Her husband, Casey Turk, said he once dreamed of living aboard a sailboat.



Dillon shared tales of her world adventures, her diagnosis and her aversion to continued treatment for a disease she deemed incurable. That is, until she met [Catriona Jamieson, MD, PhD](#). Jamieson enrolled Dillon in a clinical trial that examines the effect of a drug that may block cancer cell proliferation. Moores Cancer Center is involved in more than 200 clinical trials to treat patients. So far the research study is helping Dillon to better cope with her condition. Dillon glowed when talking about the care she receives from Jamieson and other Moores Cancer Center team members.

Salvador Lobato, a lung cancer patient, his wife Maria, and Bob Medina, a myelodysplasia patient, all shared similar sentiments about their treatment at Moores Cancer Center. Medina was so appreciative of his care and of the opportunity to sail on the *JADA* that he brought chocolate-covered biscotti to share with his fellow passengers. His wife, Tita Medina, made two leis by hand, using the national flower of the Philippines, called sampaguita. Tita grows the sweet-smelling flowers, which symbolize purity, simplicity, humility and strength, in her garden.

“We wanted to say thank you and this is how I thought I could say it best,” said Tita, who finished the leis on the drive to meet the *JADA*. After the voyage, everyone was thankful for the respite, a new view of their city – and perhaps of their life.

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