Bebe Pinter

PULMONARY FIBROSIS

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I believe comparative research is the future of medicine.

Research that compares human disease to naturally occurring disease in animals—in particular dogs—is moving science forward faster and more successfully than ever imagined.

My mother and my West Highland Terrier, Rowdy, both lost their lives to the same deadly disease: pulmonary fibrosis (PF). I've had my heart broken by the disease, watching my loved ones die, feeling helpless that I could do nothing, and being frustrated with the lack of treatments.

I remember my mother, Florence, as a beautiful blonde model during my childhood. She was a mother whom every other child envied. She served as president of the PTA, enjoyed ballroom dancing, and loved me unconditionally. I remember her having hay fever and then asthma as she got older. My father was a heavy smoker, and he died of lung cancer seven years before my mother died of PF.

As the disease progressed, my mother's lungs became scarred. She had to quit dancing, and later even walking for any length of time.

I remember the violent coughing and hearing her lungs crackling. Her doctors treated her with large doses of prednisone, and she lived out her days on supplemental oxygen. She went to the hospital many times and overtime lost four inches in height from osteoporosis, a side-effect of the drug. She died just before Thanksgiving in 1986 at 71.

In 1988, Rowdy came into my life. When Rowdy was nearly 11 years old, I noticed he was slowing down. He panted whenever he walked, and he stopped playing with his toys. One day I took him to his veterinarian who told me nothing could be done. I never had

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Pulmonary fibrosis describes a group of lung diseases in which thickening of the walls of the air sacs (called alveoli), caused by scarring, can result in cough, shortness of breath, fatigue and low blood oxygen levels. It can be caused by an identifiable irritation to the lungs, but in many cases the cause is unknown, which is described as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Idiopathic means there is no known cause at this time. Symptoms include:

- Dry cough or shortness of breath
- Abnormal breath sounds—crackles (like Velcro) can be heard by your health care provider when you take a deep breath
- The ends of your fingers and/or toes have changed to a club shape (called "clubbing")

Learn more: ATS Patient Information Series. "Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF)" New York, NY: American Thoracic Society 2015. thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/idiopathic-pulmonary-fibrosis.pdf

an actual diagnosis so I never heard the words pulmonary fibrosis. Rowdy died that night at home.

I am here today because of my mother and Rowdy.

My hope lies in the hands of researchers and scientists. We know that humans and animals share some of the same diseases. Comparative research has been used successfully in the study of certain cancers and diseases. Since Westies have naturally occurring PF, they may well be a model to study the disease.

I am president of the Westie Foundation of America, Inc., which supports research to improve the health of the breed as well as other animals, including humans. In 2007, the WFA held its first conference Looking at Lung Fibrosis in Canines and Humans. Results from this meeting were published in the Annals of the American Thoracic Society.

The WFA's follow-up conference, Fibrosis Across Species, held April 2014 in Louisville, Kentucky, joined clinician investigators, researchers, veterinary doctors, pathologists, geneticists, and patient advocates to discuss the state of knowledge in lung fibrosis in humans and domestic animals. We look forward to incorporating results into white papers and submitting them to medical and veterinary journals. Like the two new drugs recently approved to treat PF, this is only the beginning.