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Doctor's battle inspires others to join cancer fight

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Dr. Stephen Williams "was able to do what many people could not: deal with all the different personalities and bring everyone together on the same playing field to create the cancer center." Marietta Moore, nurse coordinator, IU Simon Cancer Center

When Mike Etkorn heard he had testicular cancer at age 25, he was scared. His oncologist, Dr. Stephen Williams, director of the IU Simon Cancer Center and a renowned expert in testicular cancer, eased his fears by spending nearly an hour asking him questions about his life, family and what he liked to do. "It turned out he wasn't just a doctor, but a friend, very much so," said Etkorn, now 30, who was successfully treated.

Tonight, Etkorn will join more than 70 others who want to honor the doctor's gift of medicine and his selfless life by walking as Team Williams in the Outrun the Sun Race Against Melanoma at Fort Harrison State Park in Lawrence. They will be walking without him, though. Williams, who agreed last summer to be honorary co-chairman of the fundraiser, lost his own battle against melanoma in February at age 62. Choosing to be inspired rather than deterred, Etkorn will participate in today's race -- as will Williams' widow, Kathryn; their two children, Thomas, 20, and Caroline, 19; medical colleagues; friends; and neighbors. The team has raised about \$3,000 for the event. "He would have loved it being done because he thought it was a terrific organization, and he was excited about getting more involved," said Kathryn Williams, an attorney in Zionsville. She met Williams when she was an oncology nurse and married him in 1987.

Kristin Crowder, Williams' nurse when he was a patient, came up with the idea of creating a team. Given his personality, Kathryn Williams said, her husband would have been humbled and even embarrassed, especially about his "big face" on the buttons team members will be wearing. She said he would have named the team for the IU Simon Cancer Center, which he had led since its creation in 1992. "This place is his baby," said Marietta Moore, a nurse coordinator at the center who worked with Williams for 10 years. "He was able to do what many people could not: deal with all the different personalities and bring everyone together on the same playing field to create the cancer center." While his ovarian and testicular cancer research made a major impact in the field of medicine, patients, friends and family say it was his loving manner and gracious giving of his time that touched everyone he met. "He was just always interested in what was going on in our lives, selfless in not always focusing on what he was doing and modest about his successes," said Suzanne Irwin, a nurse who met him in 1971. Her husband, Michael Irwin, golfed with Williams, and the couples enjoyed cookouts and many good conversations over the years.

Kathryn Williams, known as Kay, knows full well the selfless nature of her husband, who was diagnosed in 2006 with a cancerous mole on his chest. "He viewed his success if he enabled somebody else to succeed." She remembers, too, that he had "this huge, beaming smile, even when he was going through cancer." After going into remission, the cancer returned in 2008 in his lymph nodes, lungs and, ultimately, his brain. Before he died, Williams told Etkorn that

when he beat his own cancer, he wanted to spend more time helping people become aware of its risk and how to lessen those risks. He didn't get a chance to do that, although he treated some melanoma patients when he was in remission. Even after Williams died, he played a role in Etkorn's discovery in May that he, too, had melanoma, which is sometimes linked to testicular cancer. "Williams is part of the reason we caught it early," said Etkorn, a high school math teacher in Lafayette. "Watching him fight his own battle made my wife and me more aware. We (Williams and Etkorn) talked about melanoma before his diagnosis."

So, Etkorn will walk the 5K event today, remembering the doctor who eased his fears by focusing his attention on living life, rather than dwelling on his disease. "(The race) helps me feel a little bit connected with him still and helps me carry on what he felt so strongly about," Etkorn said. "Anything I can do to carry on that desire and dream, I'll do."

What: Outrun the Sun, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit group, aims to increase awareness of melanoma and other skin cancers.

When: The group's annual run will be at 7 p.m. on June 6th at Fort Harrison State Park in Lawrence.

Categories: It consists of a five-mile competitive run, a 5K non-competitive race/walk and a one-mile fun run.

Who: More than 2,500 survivors and others are expected to participate in the fifth annual event. Team Williams is the largest of 56 teams participating in the fundraiser, which supports Outrun the Sun's education and research programs.

Honorary co-chairmen: Dr. Stephen Williams, who agreed to be honorary race co-chairman last summer before his death Feb. 15, will be honored before the events with an inscribed memento given to his wife. **Co-Chairman Dr. Timothy Ratliff, director of the Purdue University Cancer Center, also will be recognized.**

Information: www.outrunthesun.org.