



Peter Ruvolo

May 16, 1961 - May 12, 2021

Dr. Peter Ruvolo, age 59, passed away May 12, 2021 after a long battle with adenoid cystic carcinoma. He was an associate professor in the Leukemia Department at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. He will always be admired for his tenacity, kindness, and significant contributions to cancer research.

A kid from blue-collar Brooklyn makes good.

Peter was born in Brooklyn to Mrs. Elaine Ruvolo and Mr. Anthony Ruvolo. His father was a plumber, and his mother worked at Catholic Guardians where she helped to arrange adoptions. He has three younger sisters: Maria Faccioli, Elena McDorman and Kristina Gilleece.

Peter grew up in South Brooklyn where he first worked as a delivery boy for a butcher shop. He was named for his grandfather, who emigrated from Palermo and with his wife's family ran a candy store and luncheonette. His grandmother, Maria, would cook the meals, and all the children took turns helping out in the store after school. He attended Xaverian High School, a Catholic school, where he proved to be an exceptional athlete. He wrestled for the school's team, competed in the Empire State Games, and finished fourth in his weight class in all-state competition.

Peter was the first in his family to graduate college. He took a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from Columbia University. There he met his wife

Vivian; they married after they left Columbia. He studied molecular biology with Dr. John W. Chase at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, where he took his master's and doctoral degrees. He completed a post-doctoral fellowship at New York University with Dr. David Schwartz, where he studied pulsed-field gradient electrophoresis, and another at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine with Dr. Allan Hess, where he studied graft versus host disease in leukemia.

He was an ardent soldier in the battle against cancer.

Peter then joined the laboratory of Dr. W. Stratford May, Jr., at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston to study Bcl-2, a cancer cell survival regulator. During this time, he met Drs. Michael Andreeff, Steven Kornblau and Marina Konopleva at MD Anderson Cancer Center; from then on the Andreeff and the May labs pursued the mechanism by which Bcl-2 prevents apoptosis as collaborators in work that culminated nearly a decade later in the report of the first potent small-molecule Bcl-2 inhibitor, ABT-737, published in *Cancer Cell* in 2006.

Peter accompanied Dr. May when the latter was recruited to the University of Florida. There, Peter studied the mechanism by which protein phosphatase PP2A modulates the action of Bcl-2, work for which he received an R01 award from the National Cancer Institute. He was recruited by Nobel laureate Ferid Murad to the Institute for Molecular Medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. He then went on the University of Minnesota Hormel Institute as an associate professor, where he headed the Section of Signal Transduction and Apoptosis. His research continued to focus on leukemia therapy and mechanisms of drug resistance.

In 2010, Peter returned to Houston to join the Leukemia Department at MD Anderson Cancer Center as a member of the Section of Molecular Hematology and Therapy headed by Dr. Michael Andreeff. There he made critical contributions to the understanding of the role of another pro-survival

Bcl-2 family protein, Mcl-1, in the pathogenesis and chemoresistance of acute myeloid leukemia. Over the past decade, he has contributed to several high impact research projects and collaborative efforts, and he has mentored many junior scientists along the way.

Peter was particularly interested in the mechanisms by which signal transduction in leukemic cells and the leukemia microenvironment contribute to drug resistance. He has published seminal reviews on the roles of galectin 3 (Ruvolo P. P., et al. *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta Molecular Cell Research*, 2020, Ruvolo P. P., et al. *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, 2016) and protein phosphatases (Ruvolo P. P., *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta Molecular Cell Research*, 2019) in this process. He was invited to present his work on galectin 3 at the 21st World Congress on Advances in Oncology and the 19th International Symposium on Molecular Medicine in Athens, Greece in October, 2016. He was guest editor of two special issues of *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, one on the tumor microenvironment and the other on protein phosphatases. At the time of his death, he was studying the role of AXL, a receptor tyrosine kinase, in the chemoresistance of AML.

Peter was highly regarded by his peers, with a hundred peer-reviewed publications, abstracts and book chapters to his credit. He served on the editorial boards of *Leukemia*, *Journal of Signal Transduction*, and *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*. He has also reviewed for *Cancer Research*, *Molecular Pharmacology*, *Experimental Hematology*, *Apoptosis*, *Cell Death & Differentiation* and *Journal of Cell Signaling*.

Outside of work, Peter enjoyed staying active by participating in team sports. He put together and played in a softball team while at Albert Einstein and again while in Galveston. He played club-level hockey while in college and continued playing hockey in leagues for the past two decades. When Space City Ice Station closed, he reorganized the league that used to play there and moved it to the Bellerive Ice Center in Houston. Even during his cancer therapy, he stayed active in local hockey, helping match players new to the

league with teams at their skill level and maintain competitive balance within the league.

Thoughts from friends, colleagues, and family.

“It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of Peter’s passing today. His wife, Vivian, was at his side. He was fighting his cancer until the very end, worked until his last days, and was never defeated. He was defiant of his disease and did not give up. I admired his tenacity in the face of the greatest challenge, and for the many years that we worked together, I appreciated his intellectual brilliance and strategic thinking regarding targeting vulnerabilities in leukemia cells that others did not recognize. Our thoughts are with Vivian and his sister, who are both working in the Leukemia Department.” - Michael Andreeff

“We lost a great Leukemia family member and a great human being.” - Hagop Kantarjian

“Peter was my dear friend and colleague. He was the most welcoming, kind, and sharing scientist that I ever met, always eager to help with knowledge, give a hand in experiments, help with resources. During his work in Galveston, Peter invited me, at that time a research scientist, down for training and taught me a complex metabolic protein labeling technique. He was a wonderful mentor and great collaborator. We always cherished our friendship and supported each other in difficult times. Peter was incredibly brave in his own fight with cancer, and he devoted all his efforts to research and discoveries even amid challenging treatments and side effects. None of this could detract Peter from his passion for science and research. Peter will always stay in my heart and my thoughts, and his dedication, relentless drive, and strength will inspire me for years to come.” - Marina Konopleva

“Peter was a great colleague and an even better friend. Peter never turned down the opportunity to help anyone in need. His selfless attitude (along with his New York humor) will be missed. Even during his most difficult times battling cancer, Peter never lost his desire to assist others, include students and post-docs in scientific discussions, or even add a joke when needed. His generosity in giving his time, effort, and friendship will never be forgotten by the people he touched. I will miss his presence and his kindness.” - Sean Post

“Peter will be missed greatly. It was always a pleasure working with him, I will miss him.” - Jared Burks

“I had the pleasure of being Dr. Ruvolo’s assistant for over 10 years. He really was a good man; a true gentleman who will be dearly missed by many.” - Joan Hoover-Zuniga

“To some, a rich life is materialistic. One would measure another’s richness by the car they drive or the type of home they own. For me, a rich life is the mark that you leave on this earth when you pass. My Brother was truly one of the richest men on earth based on the outpouring of love and support by those he left behind. The passing of my Brother, and friend, has been one of the hardest events I have had to endure, but your kindness has brought comfort to me and my family. I just wanted to let you all know how much your efforts are appreciated.” - Maria Facciolli

Peter is survived by:

Vivian Ruvolo

Elaine Ruvolo

Maria Facciolli and her husband Anthony Facciolli (a 9/11 first responder and survivor)

Elena McDorman and her husband Gregory McDorman

Kristina Gilleece and her husband Robert Gilleece
Four nieces: Trina, Gracelyn, Julia, and Melissa
Four nephews: Anthony, Ryan, Gregory, and Daniel
One great nephew: Antonio

He was preceded in death by his Father, Anthony Ruvolo (October 2009).

Donations in Peter's name can be made to USA Hockey, the ASPCA, or the Houston Humane Society.

Tribute Wall



“ I remember my cousin Peter at Christmas Dinner when I was 11 years old. I was excited to ride the subway in Brooklyn, New York. My Aunt Elaine and Uncle and cousins were very kind too me since I visited that year from North Carolina! Julia Northrup Novotny.

Julia Northrup - December 23, 2024 at 08:21 PM



“ *Peter Ruvolo*

October 08, 2023 at 10:52 AM



“ *Peter Ruvolo*

October 06, 2023 at 01:12 AM



“ *Peter Ruvolo*

October 05, 2023 at 09:45 AM



“ *Peter Ruvolo*

October 05, 2023 at 01:54 AM

AN

“ I met Pete almost 8 years ago when my husband began playing hockey at Space City Ice Station. Pete welcomed all newcomers as if they were old friends and took the time to help explain the rules and nuances of the game to this novice hockey wife. Pete always had a kind or encouraging word for every person and his absolute joy and love of the sport was apparent in every high five and every goal celebration. I recently learned that he only allowed family to call him Pete and I'm humbled to be a part of the hockey community that knew, loved and played with Pete. He will certainly be missed but the hockey family in Houston will never forget him.

Angela - June 03, 2021 at 07:50 PM

MG

“ Pete had a way of making you feel not only welcome, but like he was looking for you and excited to be there. Always, with everyone. That type of heart is rare and unforgettable.

Mike Godina - June 03, 2021 at 12:24 AM

RP

“ I’ve known Pete since I moved to Houston in 2005. He was a hockey teammate and quickly became my friend to my best friend. When my father passed away in 2006, Pete became my father figure. He has done so much for the Hockey Community that he will and will remain a legend. He knew everyone. He talked to everyone. He never held a grudge on or off the ice. We all called him *The Godfather*. He took care of tournaments, leagues, practices, etc. He would help pay players league fees so they could enjoy the game of hockey. Pete would go to each player after each game and talk about how great they played and give you the highlights of your game. When you returned the favor, he didn’t want to hear it because he was too humble. As I said before, Pete was my teammate since 2005 and I never did anything without him. The respect he received from other players was endless and is still growing as we speak. He was a huge Slipnot fan. Not what you would think Pete would like, yet he was full of surprises. When he found out about his cancer, he said he would fight until the end and he did. That’s what Vikings do and he was one. I am honored to have known Pete “*The Godfather* “ Ruvolo. I will never forget you and I will continue to tell the stories of you. I love you buddy. Attached is a photo of our tournament team that Pete put together. We banded together and we all agree that Pete was on our side the whole time. We won. We won for the love of our fallen teammate. The Trophy was also named in his honor



Rick Patberg - June 02, 2021 at 10:21 PM