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## Young adults stand up to cancer

### Patients mingle with survivors

By **Harold McNeil**

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The ground-floor restaurant at the Pearl Street Grill and Brewery in downtown Buffalo on Thursday was teeming with young adult cancer patients and survivors enjoying a good meal, drinks and music.

They weren't crying in their beers over having been diagnosed with cancer, because it's not what they prefer to do, said Kali Mordaunt, chairwoman of the "I'm Too Young For This! Cancer Foundation."

"If you want to go to a support group or cry in the shower, go to any other support group, not ours," said Mordaunt, during the group's inaugural "Stupid Cancer Kickoff Party."

"I just think that's how 20- and 30-year-olds deal with it. I don't think they can deal with it crying alone and being coddled. I think you need to find empowerment and own your diagnosis, and be proud of who you are as a survivor," she added.

Mordaunt, of Grand Island, is in her mid-20s. She was first diagnosed with brain cancer at age 21 and remains in treatment. Every year, she said, 70,000 15-to 40-year olds in the United States are diagnosed with cancer.

"A lot of times we don't think about what young people have to go through when they get cancer. When a young person is diagnosed, a lot of times, they are just going off to college or just starting their careers," said Mordaunt, who trained and worked as a social worker in New York City until she returned to her hometown late last year.

Many young people who are diagnosed with cancer also have to think about health insurance when they may not yet be covered and the effect some cancer treatments will have on their fertility in the future, among other worries that don't normally plague young adults when they're on the cusp of starting their lives.

Dr. Lynda Beaupin, a cancer treatment physician at Roswell Park Cancer Institute who specializes in the treatment of adolescent and young adult cancer patients, also is the coordinator of the “I’m Too Young For This!” cancer program at Roswell Park.

“In 2006, the National Cancer Institute teamed up with the Lance Armstrong Foundation, and they recognized that the 15-to 39-year-old patient population is unique compared with the pediatric population and the elderly cancer population. [Adolescents and young adults] have not seen any improvement in survival rates over the last 20 years,” Beaupin said.

She said there are several factors that may account for this, including delays in diagnosing young adult cancer patients because they may not be as attuned to noticing symptoms of the disease.

“People this age are known to not pay too much attention to their symptoms. It could be that the biology of the cancer disease itself may be different in this population compared to the older and younger populations,” said Beaupin, noting that participation in clinical trials is critical for this age group, as it provides a base for doctors to learn more about how the disease affects young adults and what are appropriate therapies.

The program at Roswell Park is supported by the Steadfast Foundation, which was created by Buffalo Sabres goalie Ryan Miller.

“He’s been very supportive of our mission,” Beaupin said.

More information about the support/advocacy group can be found online at [stupidcancer.com](http://stupidcancer.com).