

Tar Heel Footprints in Health Care

*A periodic feature that recognizes individuals whose efforts—
often unsung—enhance the health of North Carolinians*

Tami Kittrell



Tami Kittrell, a senior administrative assistant at Aetna, Inc., in High Point, North Carolina, received a phone call on Thursday, April 29, 2010, that drastically altered her life. Learning that she had been diagnosed

with T-cell lymphoma, Kittrell recalls that she initially felt confused and devastated, and at first she only told selected friends and family members about her diagnosis. In the following weeks, she spent hours researching her diagnosis on the Internet and searching for patient support groups. After starting treatment, Kittrell learned about The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS), the world's largest voluntary health agency committed to blood cancer. She contacted the LLS national office and asked to be connected with a fellow patient for peer support, which was provided through the Patti Kauffman Robinson First Connection program, and she took advantage of LLS's financial support resources. Kittrell also attended her first Light the Night Walk, an LLS fundraiser event, in the Piedmont in 2011. Kittrell had participated in other walking events over the past 15 years but says that this was the first walk to which she truly felt connected.

In 2012 Kittrell started to increase her involvement with the North Carolina chapter of LLS. Through the Aetna Employees Reaching Out (AERO) program, Kittrell served as a team push captain for

the Light the Night Walk in 2012, 2013, and 2014. The AERO program supports Aetna employees as they raise money for charities, and the program donates monthly proceeds to specific causes.

Since 2012 Kittrell has held numerous fundraising events including yard sales, Zumbathons, and giveaways. To date, Kittrell has raised over \$5,000 for LLS. She also engages family and friends by raising awareness about leukemia and lymphoma, because most people know less about these cancers than they do about breast cancer or lung cancer. Recently she was invited to Capitol Hill to attend national LLS advocacy training and to speak to legislators in support of House Bill 460 and Senate Bill 2827, which would cap the prices of cancer medications.

Loreal Massiah, the manager of patient access, education, and advocacy at the North Carolina branch of LLS, lauds Kittrell's work, saying "[Kittrell] has been a magnificent volunteer at our local chapter of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. She has worked diligently with our chapter to raise research funds at our Light the Night Walk and has advocated on behalf of all patients by sharing her personal story on Capitol Hill to help all patients access quality affordable care." NCMJ

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