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Fight against brain cancer hits the pavement today

DEBRA SKODACK September 8, 2009



Photo by KEITH MYERS

On Friday, Danny Weaver walked through the corridors of St. Luke's Hospital headed to radiation therapy as part of his fight against brain cancer.

This morning, the 36-year-old father of four will again be taking steps to fight the disease, but this time it will be by participating in the Head for the Cure 5K Run and Walk in Corporate Woods.

This is the seventh annual Head for the Cure, which benefits the Chris Anthony Brain Tumor Research Fund at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and Solace House, a center for grieving children in Kansas City.

Chris Anthony of Leawood died of brain cancer at age 37 in February 2003. The Head for the Cure Foundation was formed in his honor and is led by Anthony's brother, Matt, who is chief executive officer of VML, a Kansas City marketing and advertising agency.

Last year, the run and other events raised \$200,000.

Weaver today will be walking with his team, "All In For Danny," a reference to his love of poker. Altogether, a record crowd is expected, with perhaps as many as 4,000 people. Between 140 and 200 participants are expected to be on Weaver's team.

"I think it's pretty cool that that many people care — that they are pulling for me," Weaver said Friday, sitting in St. Luke's Hospital waiting for treatment.

Weaver, of Shawnee, was diagnosed in late June after suffering severe headaches. Surgery removed a tennis-ball-size tumor, and his treatment has included both radiation and chemotherapy. Weaver is one of this year's recipients of the Head for the Cure Keeping the Faith award, an honor to recognize people who inspire others.

Matt Anthony said it is poignant that this year's walk is being held within a week of Sen. Edward Kennedy's death from brain cancer.

"It does bring it to light," Anthony said.

About 359,000 people in the U.S. are living with a primary brain or central nervous system tumor, according to the Central Brain Tumor Registry. According to the American Brain Tumor Association, 52,200 men, women and children were diagnosed last year with a primary brain tumor.

"Malignant brain disease is becoming more prevalent, but it doesn't have the visibility of some cancers," Anthony said.

He said that could be due in part to the smaller number of people affected with brain cancer compared with some other cancers. And funding for research into brain cancers might trail other research.

And, Anthony added, brain cancer is a very complicated disease in a very complicated part of the body.

"That being said, there is definitely progress," Anthony said.

Progress in both research and treatment, the evidence being more people living much longer with the disease.

Anthony said today's event is designed to be a celebration about life, solidarity and hope.

"There is nothing sad about it," Anthony said. "People are inspired, and you realize that there are a lot of people out there to help."

The details

For more information about the Head for the Cure Foundation, go to www.headforthecure.org. There will be runs/walks for the organization on Sept. 13 in Lawrence and on Oct. 17 in Columbia.