

GynOncs Rock at Society Meetings

Band Looks Forward to Bigger & Better Gigs, While Raising Awareness of Women's Cancers

BY MARGOT J. FROMER



N.E.D. in action at this year's SGO Annual Meeting "Fight Night," a new twist on pro-con debates, with the "combatants" wrestling with controversial topics in ovarian and endometrial cancers in a real boxing ring. At the end of the two-hour debates, the band stepped up for a ringside jam session.

Bottom and next page: At the Gynecologic Oncology Group Semi-Annual Meeting last month

It's new. It's loud. It's fun. It's "N.E.D."—a rock band organized by the Society of Gynecologic Oncology, stepping out of its usual role and into the world of music with a unique way to entertain members at SGO meetings.

"Larry Maxwell called Nimesh [Nagarsheth] and me to float the idea of having some of us who he knew played and sang to form a little combo," said William E. Winter, III, MD, a staff oncologist at Northwest Cancer Specialists in Portland, Oregon, the lead guitar and singer.

"So we phoned others who liked to play, and they were enthusiastic. We e-mailed back and forth and decided on the songs we wanted to do, and we each learned our own parts separately. Then after only one six-hour rehearsal, we did it—and we were good! Much better than we had expected."

LTC(P) Larry Maxwell, MD, Director of the Gynecologic Disease Center at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and a member of the SGO Program Committee for Postgraduate Programs and Special Events, said the idea started because he wanted to enhance the entertainment portion of the Annual Meeting: "I knew four of the members at one time or another during residency, and then it was just a matter of phoning around to see who was interested."

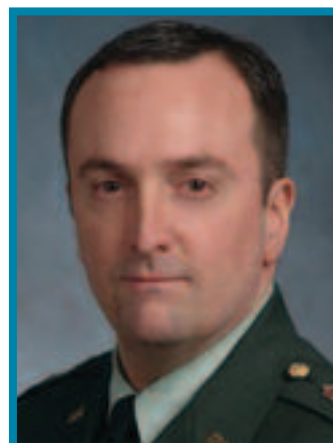
"This has been fun," agreed William R. (Rusty) Robinson, MD, Professor and

Director of Clinical Research at Harrington Cancer Center of Texas Tech University Health Science Center—bass guitar, harmonica, vocals, and songwriter. "I didn't

know what to make of it at first, but we hit on the right combination of people at the right time, in the right circumstances.

"The band and the music has been well





Band members (left to right): Joanie Hope, MD; William Winter, MD; Nimesh Nagarsheth, MD; William R. (Rusty) Robinson, MD; and Larry Maxwell, MD. Not shown are John F. Boggess, MD, Associate Professor of Gynecologic Oncology and Director of the Robotic Assisted Medicine Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, guitar and lead vocals; and John T. Soper, MD, Hendricks Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, also at UNC at Chapel Hill, guitar.

received, and although we haven't performed for the general public yet, it will be good for patients to see their doctors in another guise—as more human.”

Getting Started

The band, which they named N.E.D.—for, of course, no evidence of disease—plays a mix of rock and alternative rock and includes two guitars, one bass guitar, one drummer, and two vocalists. It started as a climax to “Fight Night” at the SGO's most recent annual meeting in March.

The Society's Immediate Past President, Andrew Berchuck, MD, Director of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology at Duke University Medical Center, explained that the event, the brainchild of Dr. Maxwell, was a combination performance, educational forum, and spoof: “The ‘combatants’ got dressed up in trunks and gloves and stepped into a real boxing ring, accompanied by handlers and trainers and a cheering section.

“They debated various issues of diagnosis and treatment, but there was also a lot of joking around, and sometimes it got a bit raucous. There were more than a thousand people watching, and everyone loved it,” Dr. Berchuck said. Afterwards, N.E.D. stepped up to perform for the first time, and the crowd really went wild.

Inform, Inspire Hope

Then in early April at the First National Gynecologic Cancer Symposium, N.E.D. performed again at Arlington National Cemetery at the memorial to military

women who died in the line of duty. “The goal is to raise awareness about women's cancer, and to that end, the band is writing songs that are intended to inform and provide hope,” Dr. Maxwell said.

“Next year, at the SGO meeting in Washington, we hope to sponsor a marathon to raise funds for screening, clinical trials, and patient education. And in September for Gynecologic Awareness Month, we're planning activities that will involve the public, academia, gynecologic cancer advocacy groups, and Congress. Our goal is to increase people's knowledge, and part of that effort will include performances by N.E.D. The entertainment will enhance the educational value.”

Bandmember Nimesh Nagarsheth, MD, Assistant Professor in the Division of Gynecologic Oncology at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, the driving force behind N.E.D. and who plays drums, percussion, and guitar and is another songwriter, said, “We think this band can show that doctors suffer emotional trauma too when taking care of cancer patients, albeit of a different kind, and the lyrics of some of our songs reflect that. They and our performances show us as creative people who have lives—and fun—away from the bedside.”

And Joanie Hope, MD, a gynecologic oncology fellow at New York University Medical Center, lead vocalist and songwriter, said she has been musical since she was a child: “When I was in medical school, I wrote lots of songs with medical themes, because medicine is, after all, about people

and their troubles. When I was in residency, I didn't have time to do much with music, but now that I've found this band, I'm able to tap into my creative energy again.”

Dr. Hope wants a future for N.E.D.—for the band to “speak to people” and play music for audiences beyond those at medical meetings. “I want people to listen to us at home so that our music and lyrics reflect what they are feeling if they have cancer, or someone they love does.”

That would entail a recording contract, which is fine with Dr. Nagarsheth. “I'd like us to make a CD,” he said. “We could sell them at concerts as a fundraising tool, and we could put educational inserts about women's cancer inside the case. Joanie and I, as the ‘New York division of N.E.D.,’ have already written ten original songs, some with lyrics about cancer, and some recording companies have expressed interest.”

The performance side of the N.E.D. endeavor has gone so well that they have had invitations to play at other cancer meetings: the Western Association of Gynecologic Oncologists in Vancouver, SGO in San Antonio next year, and they already played last month at the Gynecologic Oncology Group Semi-Annual Meeting in Chicago. “These activities may be a new way to reach the public and promote cancer awareness, prevention, and treatment,” Dr. Nagarsheth said.

“This is a unique way to get the message out—a message of hope,” added Dr. Winter. “It lets us use our artistic talents to showcase cancer awareness.” □