



# BASSER RESEARCH CENTER for BRCA

Abramson Cancer Center  
 Penn Medicine

JULY 2014 PROGRESS REPORT

*“All of us have Homologous Hope. Hope that we can fund the research, find the cure, repair the damage that BRCA causes to thousands of families year upon year, and, as Mara’s sculpture does so beautifully, shine a bright light of promise that a cure is just one research project away from reality.”*

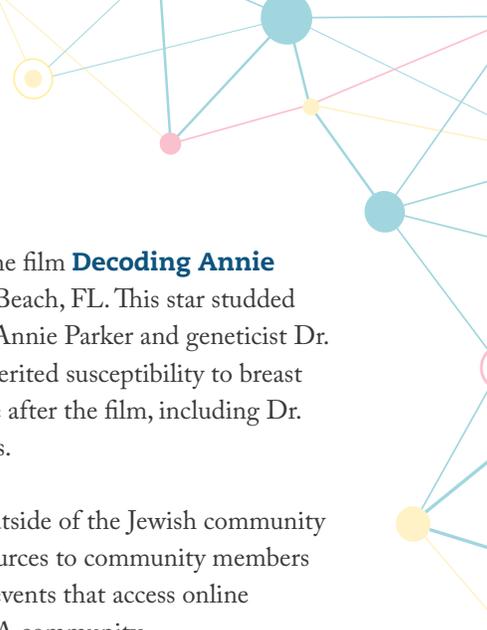
—MINDY GRAY

Founder, Basser Research Center for BRCA  
at Homologous Hope sculpture unveiling event

## Outreach and Education

The **Basser Research Center for BRCA’s** (Basser Center) comprehensive and collaborative outreach mission is focused on raising awareness of BRCA in the general community, and increasing the education and support of high-risk individuals. To this end, the Basser Center has successfully completed key outreach projects designed to inform and engage the BRCA community with a special emphasis on the Ashkenazi Jewish community, a group where the BRCA carrier rate is ten times greater than that of the general population.

- In the summer of 2013, and in collaboration with FORCE, Sharsheret, and Bright Pink, the Basser Center initiated the **Jewish Community Outreach Poster Campaign Project**, a national outreach campaign targeting the Ashkenazi Jewish population, which provided 15,000 outreach posters to over 1,500 Synagogues across the country. Mailings included state by state referral lists for local genetic counselors and a BRCA fact sheet tailored to the Jewish community.
- In September 2013, New York City’s Central Synagogue and the Basser Center, along with other collaborative partners, hosted a program titled **Inherited Breast & Ovarian Cancer: Why Jewish Families Are at Heightened Risk**. Moderated by **Barbara Walters**, the evening hosted leaders in the field, including Basser Center Executive Director Dr. Susan Domchek, and families in a lively panel discussion. The program, and subsequent discussions from the audience, focused on BRCA-related ovarian and breast cancers and the heightened risk and susceptibility of Jewish families to these genetic mutations.
- In November 2013, the Basser Center met with leadership from the Program for Jewish Genetic Health, a joint initiative of Yeshiva University and Albert Einstein College of Medicine, to develop plans for programming to increase awareness of access and outreach to *BRCA1/2* testing in the orthodox and non-orthodox community.
- In December 2013, Dr. Susan Domchek presented at the Union for Reform Judaism’s Biennial Convention in San Diego, further reaching the Jewish community and forging important connections for future collaboration, outreach, and education.
- On June 12-14, 2014, **Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE)** hosted its 8th Annual **Joining FORCEs Conference On Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer** in Philadelphia in partnership with the Basser Center. The program featured cutting-edge research, world-renowned speakers, an agenda that covered every aspect of living with hereditary breast and ovarian cancer, and topics of interest for survivors, previvors, supporters, and health care providers.

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- The Basser Center sponsored fundraiser screenings, hosted by FORCE, of the film **Decoding Annie Parker** in Los Angeles, CA, Philadelphia, PA, Washington, DC, and Palm Beach, FL. This star studded film follows the incredible story of the intersecting paths of cancer survivor Annie Parker and geneticist Dr. Mary-Claire King, who helped identify the *BRCA1* gene responsible for inherited susceptibility to breast cancer. Guests had the opportunity to learn from the expert panel that spoke after the film, including Dr. Susan Domchek, who attended the Philadelphia and Los Angeles screenings.
  - The Basser Center is working to gain support for broader outreach efforts outside of the Jewish community via an “Outreach on Wheels” program. This novel initiative will provide resources to community members around the country, allowing interested individuals the opportunity to hold events that access online webinars about *BRCA1/2*—aiding outreach efforts within the broader BRCA community.

## Research

The Basser Center infuses powerful resources to support cancer research at every stage, from granting research funding to investigators, to supporting seminars and an annual symposium that provide a platform for leaders in the field to communicate the most current discoveries and advancements in BRCA-related research and patient care.

- The Basser Center hosts a seminar series on the first Friday of every month in Penn Medicine’s Smilow Center for Translational Research. Each seminar features lectures by Basser funded or guest investigators working on *BRCA1/2* related studies from basic science to clinical research. This recurring series provides a wonderful opportunity for researchers, clinicians, and educators across the Abramson Cancer Center, Penn Medicine, and the at-large BCRA community at Penn to have greater interaction. The seminars open up many new opportunities for cross-disciplinary conversations and collaboration among researchers, while fostering an interchange of knowledge and exchange of ideas.
- Further enhancing the Basser Center’s mission, the **Basser Global Prize** was established by Shari Basser Potter and Len Potter to honor a visionary scientist whose conceptually advanced *BRCA1/2* related research has led to improvements in clinical care. The Prize provides unrestricted support to an international basic, translational, or clinical *BRCA1/2* cancer researcher who has produced seminal advances in the field.
  - The recipient of the inaugural Basser Global Prize was **Professor Alan Ashworth, FRS**, from the Institute for Cancer Research in the United Kingdom. Professor Ashworth’s laboratory focuses on using genetic principles to understand cancer biology and then uses this information to change the way patients are treated. For example, by using genetic principles his lab has developed a novel therapeutic strategy for cancer treatment using PARP inhibitors.
- The Basser Center’s **Annual Scientific Symposium** is designed to educate researchers and health care providers in cancer genetics by presenting cutting-edge data from renowned *BRCA1/2* scientists. The 2014 Symposium: **Recent Advances in Breast and Ovarian Cancer Genetics** was held on **May 6 & 7** and provided information on new strategies in genetic testing, cancer screening and prevention, and ongoing work in targeted therapy for *BRCA1/2* mutation carriers. The symposium gave attendees the opportunity to network with colleagues working in the field through a series of lectures and panel discussions. **Professor Alan Ashworth, FRS**, the inaugural **Basser Global Prize** awardee, gave the Symposium’s keynote address.

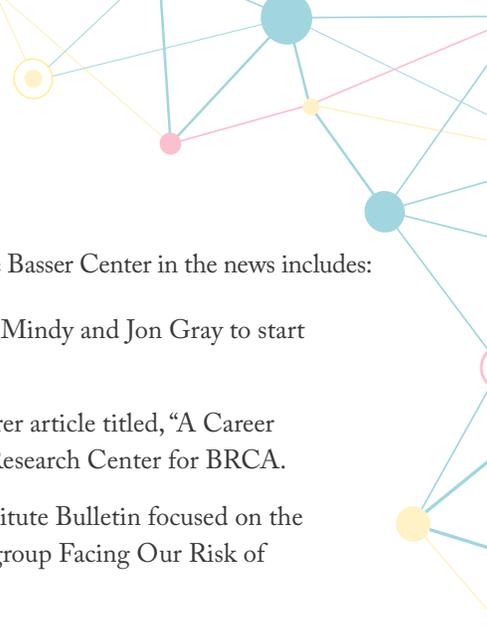
- The Basser Center provides annual funding opportunities for *BRCA 1/2* studies ranging from basic science to clinical and translational research. In 2013, the Basser Center funded nineteen grants to University of Pennsylvania scientists doing innovative BCRA-related research which exceeded \$2 million. Funded research spans work on cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, communication and survivorship. On the treatment front, Daniel Powell, PhD was funded to further develop a potent immune-based therapy for BRCA-related breast cancers that teaches the immune system's T-cells to attack the cancer. In terms of basic science, Roger Greenberg, MD, PhD has been funded to study other DNA errors present in BRCA-related cancers. Knowledge of these errors may help to predict response to certain therapies or to establish new markers for better methods of early detection.
- The Center funds grants to investigators working on projects relevant to *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*. This year we are encouraging a team approach by funding two different types of grants: **Breakthrough Science Team Awards** from interdisciplinary groups of scientists who propose innovative team approaches to a variety of key focus areas and **Outreach and Implementation Science Awards** with the goal of reducing suffering and death from *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* associated cancer by undertaking research that will optimize genetic testing, risk assessment, and clinical decision-making. Penn investigators are currently submitting these types of grants for 2014 and beyond. Grants will be reviewed throughout the summer and funding announcements will be made in August.
- In 2013, Mindy and Jon Gray made an additional gift of \$5 million to support BRCA-related pancreatic cancer research and launch the **Basser External Grants Program**, which supports research outside of Penn that has the potential to advance the care of individuals living with *BRCA 1/2* mutations. Research grant applications fall in basic science, early detection, translational or clinical research categories. The Basser Center received many proposals earlier this year and will announce the inaugural recipients this summer.
  - Award opportunities include the **Basser Team Science Award**, a \$1 million, two-year grant to research teams, and the **Basser Innovation Award**, which can be up to three \$100,000 grants for one-year, high-risk idea projects.

## Communications

- The Basser Center's website, [www.basser.org](http://www.basser.org), launched in 2013, is a content-rich, up-to-date resource for BRCA families, donors, researchers, and health care providers. It contains expert-reviewed information on risk evaluation and genetic testing, *BRCA1/2* cancer risks, approaches to managing cancer risk, and cancer diagnosis and treatment. The website also features resources for communicating with families about BRCA, adjusting to news of increased cancer risk, navigating health insurance, and learning about other people's experiences with *BRCA1/2*.

The website is extremely user friendly, with optimized search ability, and information sharing features—making it a powerful research tool. It contains:

- A blog feed for Basser PR and BRCA news that serves as an easy forum to share and provide commentary regarding media content.
  - A listing of Basser-funded studies with text and video clips of providers speaking on BRCA topics, a feed of publications by Basser Investigators, as well as open research studies, clinical trials, and Basser events.
  - A synergized social media interface that frequently uses Penn Medicine's Twitter handle and the Abramson Cancer Center's Facebook page with the goal of sharing information.
- The Basser Center launched a quarterly E-Newsletter titled "BRCA Beat," that reports on relevant and timely BCRA-related topics. The BRCA Beat currently has a mailing list of more than 600 individuals.



Since its creation, the Basser Center has received significant press. A sampling of the Basser Center in the news includes:

- **May 2012:** The New York Times reports on the \$25 million donation from Mindy and Jon Gray to start the Basser Research Center for BRCA.
- **October 2012:** Susan Domchek, MD, was featured in a Philadelphia Inquirer article titled, “A Career Inspired by Cancer Gene” that highlighted the establishment of the Basser Research Center for BRCA.
- **October 2012:** The Basser Center was featured in the National Cancer Institute Bulletin focused on the Center’s research endeavors and partnership with the support and advocacy group Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE).
- **December 2012:** Susan Domchek, MD, was featured on *Radio Times* on National Public Radio in a panel discussion called “Genetic Testing and Medicine” on the topic of how genetic testing is changing medicine for patients and doctors.
- **May 2013:** In continuing coverage of Oscar-winning actress and humanitarian Angelina Jolie’s disclosure that she underwent a prophylactic mastectomy after learning she carries a BRCA gene mutation, Susan Domchek, MD, was a featured expert in People magazine’s coverage of the cancer risks conferred by those mutations. Dr. Domchek was also interviewed on *MSNBC* about Ms. Jolie’s news.
- **October 2013:** Susan Domchek, MD, and Basser Investigator Timothy Rebbeck, PhD, were quoted in a *New York Times* article examining surgical decisions for BRCA carriers.
- **October 2013:** Susan Domchek, MD was quoted in an *MSNBC.com* article exploring the risk of ovarian cancer among women who carry BRCA gene mutations.
- **November 2013:** The Basser Center’s Jewish Outreach Poster Campaign was cited in a *New York Times* article, “In Israel, A Push to Screen for Cancer Gene Leave Many Conflicted,” on the controversial topic of universal screening for BRCA mutations in Israel.
- **November 2013:** Susan Domchek, MD, was featured in a Question & Answer column in the *New York Times* “Ask Well” section entitled, “Genetic Testing for Breast Cancer.”
- **February 2014:** Susan Domchek was quoted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, “Ovary removal aids high-risk women but at what age.”

## Events and Community Leadership

- In the Fall of 2012, events were held in Philadelphia and New York City to celebrate the establishment of the Basser Research Center for BRCA with over 400 people in attendance.
- In 2013, the Basser Center brought together the first **Basser Research Center Leadership Council**, a volunteer board that formally meets twice a year and informs and engages its members in order to enhance the Basser Center’s mission. Council members include:
  - Mindy Gray – *Chair*
  - Shari Potter
  - Anonymous Members
  - Susan Getz
  - Jessica Queller
  - Michele Konner
  - Stacey Sager

For more information on Basser Center Leadership Council members please visit [www.Basser.org/Council](http://www.Basser.org/Council).

- On March 12, 2014 the Basser Center held a celebration to formally unveil the sculpture **“Homologous Hope,”** the large-scale piece created especially for the Basser Center by internationally renowned artist **Mara G. Haseltine.** Weighing over 500 pounds and suspended from the glass atrium in the Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine, the sculpture uses LED lights to illustrate how a healthy cell repairs DNA that causes breast, ovarian, prostate, and pancreatic cancers. Created in a ribbon-diagram formation, it is an accurate depiction of the part of the *BRCA2* gene that is responsible for DNA repair.
- In 2015, the Basser Center will be launching an inaugural fundraising event in New York City to raise important resources to support the life-saving outreach, education and research initiatives that will continue to provide hope to those affected by a BRCA mutation.

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*We are thrilled to share with you this report, highlighting the strategic impact of the Basser Center’s critical work in BRCA-related cancers, and look forward to updating you on future breakthroughs in years to come.*



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