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First Recipient of the New EANO

Award: Kathy Oliver

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5



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On September 25, 2011, Kathy Oliver was awarded the first EANO Award for her efforts as the co-director of the International Brain Tumour Alliance (IBTA, www.theibta.org), an organisation dedicated to the support of brain tumour patients. The award was presented by the president of the EANO, Wolfgang Grisold. The EANO Magazine presents excerpts from her speech.

Thank you so much for the very great honour of this award.

In accepting this very generous award, I must pay tribute to the people who inspire us all to keep researching, to keep treating, to keep advocating, and to keep raising awareness of the terrible challenges of brain tumours. Those people are the brain tumour patients themselves.

Until the harsh realities of a brain tumour diagnosis directly touch your life, it is impossible to imagine what this journey will be like or where it will take you.

My son, Colin, was diagnosed at age 24 with a low-grade glioma and, as many of you know, he died 4 weeks ago from his brain tumour which had by then progressed to a glioblastoma multiforme. He passed away shortly after his 32nd birthday.

Colin continued to work full-time, live independently, and ride his beloved mountain bike up until 5 weeks before he died at home in the arms of his family. He refused to let his brain tumour define his life.

But his journey and that of so many other brain tumour patients whom I've met from around the world have certainly defined the work I've done on behalf of the International Brain Tumour Alliance over the last half dozen years.

And there is so much work to be done for brain tumour patients: in research labs, in the clinic, in the political and regulatory arenas, and in the wider general public.

I frequently say to people that every morning we should all be asking ourselves: "What can we do for brain tumour patients today?" And every evening we should ask: "Have we done enough?"

I believe we also have to look very closely at quality-of-life issues for brain tumour patients, at the whole area of information provision, and also at palliative and end-of-life care.

Having just had my first personal experience of palliative care and end-of-life care with Colin, I can only say that the compassion and support which was provided to us by our palliative care team gave us enormous comfort and confidence.



Kathy Oliver and Wolfgang Grisold. Reprinted with kind permission from ECCO.

I know that certainly not all families have access to this level of support but I believe that we must do all that we can to provide palliative and end-of-life care to brain tumour patients and their families that is as comprehensive, as sensitive, and as widely available as possible.

Colin kept a journal during his brain tumour journey and I would like to share one of the entries from it with you. I hope you derive as much inspiration from his words as I have, and that hearing them will further inspire your crucial and continuing work for brain tumour patients. The entry is from June 6, 2004, the day before Colin's awake craniotomy and after signing his informed consent for the operation.

"I myself have signed papers today mentioning the word "death" numerous times ... The great unknown, or death, does not scare me. In fact, I welcome the challenge of fighting against it. To be able to stand tall and confront it is the most exciting thing that one can do ... This [challenge] is the real thing ... Bring it on. I am ready to fight and win ..."