

# Advocates Face Many Choices in Era of Personalized Medicine

BY JOAN VENTICINQUE

*Joan Venticinque was awarded a scholarship by the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation for the second year to serve as an advocate. In this role, she has agreed to blog for CURE to keep you up-to-date from an advocate's perspective. To learn more about Venticinque, see the feature on her later this week.*

Greetings from cold San Antonio, Texas. How it can go from 82 degrees to sleet and snow in a matter of hours chills my California bones, but the warm welcome I received from the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation ([www.alamobreastcancer.org](http://www.alamobreastcancer.org)), as a member of the Patient Advocate Program, made up for the cold.

In anticipation of all the science I will need to absorb this week, I attended the National Breast Cancer Coalition's ([www.stopbreastcancer.org](http://www.stopbreastcancer.org)) Advanced Topics class this morning. We learned about the role of signaling pathways in cells and how these pathways contribute to the complexity in the development of cancer.

We also had a presentation on epigenetics, the study of changes in gene function that occur without a change in the DNA sequence that could occur by mechanisms such as DNA methylation, chromatin organization, acetylation, and phosphorylation. These could be proven targets for therapy.

There are current clinical trials for therapeutic intervention in certain blood cancers, and scientists are now starting to study ways they can exploit epigenetics for the treatment of solid tumors.

It is obvious from my first few hours here in San Antonio that the era of personalized medicine is the treatment of the future. For us advocates, especially those of us who sit on grant review committees, the question is how do we determine which road to choose for funding? Do we concentrate on the causes of breast cancer, prevention, and treatment? What about using genetics to further classify tumor type and to develop targeted therapies? The answer seems obvious; we need to go down all the roads, with all their twists and turns, ups and downs.

I know that over the next four days, I'll probably learn more than I can take in. But I will meet dedicated doctors, researchers, and scientists who are working long hours so that I can live a full life, despite my cancer diagnosis.

*For more information on epigenetics, check out the feature "Medicine's New Epicenter? Epigenetics" in the upcoming Winter 2008 issue of CURE.*

Read more of *CURE's* coverage of the 31st annual San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium at <http://media.curetoday.com/html/email/sabcs>.