Meeting Notes – Sep. 10, 2024

The LaFayette Rotary Club held its weekly meeting on Tuesday, September10, 2024. Rotarian Faye Seroyer, pictured on the right, invited as her speaker her granddaughter, LaKeitha Seroyer, pictured on the left, a cancer researcher at East Alabama Health (EAH). LaKeitha was accompanied by her mother, Tammy Seroyer.

LaKeitha graduated from LaFayette High School in 2012, moved to Birmingham, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Community Health. She was introduced to research during her internship. She went on to earn a Master's degree in Public Health from University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB). She graduated in 2019 and started her career at UAB, researching how diet and exercise contribute to cancer survival. She stayed with UAB for about one-and-a-half years, then returned to this area. When EAH began its recent expansion, that expansion included more clinical research opportunities. LaKeitha was offered and accepted a clinical research position.

LaKeitha explained the four phases of clinical trials. In the first phase, researchers are looking for safety concerns. The treatment is tested on fewer than 100 people. In phase two, the treatment group is expanded to 100-300 people. In phase three, the group is again expanded, to more than 1,000. Here the researchers are closely documenting side effects. It is in phase four, that FDA approval is sought, while still monitoring side effects. This process can take years, even decades. She also explained that not everyone with that particular kind of cancer is eligible for the trials. Patients are carefully screened and have to meet certain criteria. Some pre-existing conditions may make it unsafe for the person to participate.

One of the research projects at UAB that LaKeitha worked on involved geno-urinary cancers. Fifteen clinical trials were offered. It was here that LaKeitha discovered the importance of research. Clinical trials are offered when no more traditional treatments are available to the patient. A lot is learned whether the trial proves successful in treating the cancer or not. A big part of her role was to help ease her patients' fear.

LaKeitha is involved in a study that EAH is currently conducting, in partnership with Duke, on long COVID. A new drug is being tested. EAH is also serving as an ambassador for another study with the American Cancer Society directed at African American women.

Diane Sherriff