

Let Me Be Your Lungs: Team Phenomenal Uses Marathon to Launch National Campaign on Behalf of PH Patients

APRIL 25, 2016 – For a handful of athletes running in the Pittsburgh Marathon, the simple act of breathing not only pushes them in training, but makes this race about more than merely conquering individual goals. Instead, they'll be crossing the finish line for those afflicted with Pulmonary Hypertension. They'll do so with a single request in mind: Let Me Be Your Lungs.

“When I get tired, I remember those who can't run, what they would give to have this simple gift I take for granted, and I run harder for them,” said Kelly Kiebler. “I know they would do the same for me.”

Kiebler is one of 26 athletes racing this year's marathon with Team Phenomenal Hope, a nonprofit that uses sporting events as a platform to spread awareness about pulmonary hypertension (PH). This disease leads to heart failure and, in some cases, requires a lung transplant to survive. Everyday activities, like walking up a flight of stairs or even emptying the dishwasher, leaves someone living with PH short of breath and fatigued.

Because running in a marathon is not a possibility for these patients, Team Phenomenal Hope athletes have stepped up to launch the “Let Me Be Your Lungs” campaign. This initiative pairs athletes and patients for endurance events taking place all year. The Pittsburgh Marathon will serve as the inaugural kickoff of #LetMeBeYourLungs, with many patients planning on being in attendance to cheer on their specific athlete.

“This disease affects many people, yet has largely flown under the radar as far as awareness goes,” said Dr. Patricia George, Team PHenomenal Hope co-founder and a pulmonologist at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC). “People across the world living with PH are in their own race every day. The Let Me Be Your Lungs campaign is just one more way we can align our PH warriors with those who are fighting for them alongside.”

Kiebler is matched up with Victoria Johnson, a PH patient living in Pittsburgh. Jessica Romanias and Julia Feitner represent another pair. Feitner, who also resides in Pittsburgh, was received her PH diagnosis in 2004 when she was pregnant with her second child.

“I compete for Julia Feitner because she deserves a friend cheering her on in this journey,” said Romanias, a nurse who works PH patients. “It's an honor to cross the finish line on her behalf.”

Beyond supporting patients and runners for the marathon, Team PHenomenal Hope also is partnering with Mojo Running & Multisport of Pittsburgh to greet athletes at an expo booth. In addition, their volunteers also will be manning a water station at mile-marker eight.

“What better way to spread awareness about pulmonary hypertension than at one of Pittsburgh's biggest events of the year,” George said.

About Team PHenomenal Hope

Team PHenomenal Hope is a nonprofit made up of professionals in the medical and athletic communities.

Members of the group compete in cycling, running and triathlon outings around the world to raise donations for research, while at the same time educating the public on the greater cause. Since its launch four years ago, the nonprofit has garnered national attention and support from major sponsors and the pulmonary hypertension community. For more information, including a schedule of events, visit <http://www.teamphenomenalhope.org/>