



## The Physician Musician Amarillo Oncologist Rocks For Cancer Awareness

By Jon Mark Beilue



Dr. Rusty Robinson holds his bass guitar Monday at the Harrington Cancer Center. [Michael Schumacher/Amarillo Globe News]

Until this year, the closest brush with musical notoriety for Dr. Rusty Robinson was when he was a medical student in Memphis, Tenn., and famed rocker Jerry Lee Lewis was rushed in for treatment.

Great balls of fire, look what's happening now. Robinson recently returned from New York, where he was in the studio with five other like-minded gynecologic oncologists from across the country in pre-production for their own CD of original recordings.

"It's a creative outlet for us," said Robinson, director of research at the Harrington Cancer Center and professor of women's health and oncology at the Texas Tech Medical School. "Those of us who have a creative bent kind of revel in things like this. This is a way to express that creative desire.

"A lot of surgeons have that in some way. Not necessarily music, but art or writing, too. It takes your mind off things. Unfortunately, there's plenty of downside in our profession."

These rock docs are combining their musical hobby with their passion for fighting women's cancers. Their CD is scheduled for release in September, which is Gynecologic Cancer Month. The CD will raise money and promote awareness of deadly cancers that don't have the same recognition as breast cancer.

The songs, all written by group members and played in classic and alternative rock style, deal with the issues many with cancer face.

Robinson, who plays bass guitar and harmonica as well as sings, penned one song, "Don't Start the Party." It's based on one of his most animated patients, who befriended several other women during their chemotherapy treatments.

"They played cards, laughed and sang songs and they got so loud our head nurse had to almost separate them," Robinson said. "As this patient was finishing her treatment one day, she turned around and told them, 'Don't start the party until I get here next time.' "

These physician musicians also have a name - NED. Not to be confused with Rock Hall of Famers R.E.M. - and not that anybody would - the name is an acronym that is music to the ears of patient and doctor. It stands for No Evidence of Disease.

"We use that all the time, and patients kind of pick up on that," Robinson said. "Some have said to me that's the best thing patients want to hear. It's obscure enough so that people will ask about it, but doctors and a lot of patients will get it."

So how do Drs. William Winter of Portland, Ore., John Soper and John Boggess of UNC-Chapel Hill, Nimesh Nagarsheth of Mt. Sinai, N.Y., School of Medicine, Joanie Hope of New York University Medical Center and Robinson come together in the name of rock 'n' roll and cancer awareness?

Mainly through social gatherings at professional conferences, and inquiring about hobbies and interests. Three months prior to the group's annual convention last February in Tampa, a member of the entertainment committee

asked Winter if he could provide some in-house music. The calls went out and it was game on.

While each member practiced their set at home leading up to the conference, a blast e-mail went out in search of a lead female singer. Hope replied and even sent an audition tape. When they convened in Tampa, they practiced together twice before playing before more than 1,000 physicians.

"We were terrified," Robinson said. "I thought we'd be God-awful, but we were considerably better than we thought we'd be. We played encores and they loved us. Then we started to get more requests from other groups to play. We had to turn several down because we just didn't have time."

But they did find time for Motema, a New York record label that features jazz performers and also works with nonprofits. Motema contacted them this summer. Producing the CD is Mario McNulty, who also produces rocker David Bowie's music. The Columbia School of Journalism in New York filmed NED's first recording session. They return to record again in March, the only time their schedules allow.

"It's therapeutic, absolutely, no question," said Robinson, who has dabbled locally with The Blue Johnnies and Insufficient Funds. "It's painful to tell a young woman with children she has a disease she won't recover from.

"There's a line in one of our songs, 'Third person reality,' about what the patient and doctor are thinking as they're in the office that says, 'Come through the door, time to shatter another dream ...'

"Even though we do it for awareness and altruistic reasons, we all get a lot of personal benefit from it, too."