

Caroline Lazar – LBCA Travel Scholarship Recipient for 2025 NBCC’s Advocate Leadership Summit

First of all, words cannot even begin to describe the range of emotions that I felt attending NBCC’s Advocate Leadership Summit and Lobby Day. I was inspired, sad, heightened, and overall ecstatic about what I learned over my three days of research and scientific sessions on breast cancer, which culminated in over 200 meetings with Congressional staff at Capitol Hill. Unfortunately, my story hits close to home as I was diagnosed in August 2024 at the age of 45 with metastatic ILC. I found myself educating other patient advocates at the Summit on the sneaky and uncommon nature of my advanced ILC. Now that I have a taste of breast cancer advocacy, I know that I will continue to gain more background and training so I can have “a seat at the table” with scientists as a ILC research advocate.

One of my favorite sessions was the Artemis Plenary. The National Breast Cancer Coalition’s Artemis Project is a patient/research advocate-led collaboration of both scientists and advocates focused on developing cutting-edge research to tackle two areas:

1. Primary prevention: How can we stop breast cancer before it starts?
2. Prevention of metastasis: How can we prevent breast cancer from becoming a terminal disease?

Those scientists at Artemis designed a vaccine that targets six tumor-specific proteins in breast cells and is on track for Phase 1 clinical trials in summer 2025. Since there are disparities in socioeconomic status, education, and access to healthcare, there must be assurance of global affordability and accessibility if this preventive vaccine comes to market. In order to end breast cancer for everyone, we need to know why it is worse for some people.

In the plenary session, “Advances and Insights in the Breast Cancer Treatment Landscape,” I heard that breast cancer is alarmingly increasing in young women under 40 years old. It was brought up that environmental and lifestyle factors (for example, binge drinking) – which vary by geography – may play a key role in the observed risk factors of breast cancer cases in these young women. I also learned that Invasive lobular carcinoma (ILC) is the most common “uncommon subtype” of breast cancers. It has been chronically understudied and presents unique clinical challenges. One of the speakers also noted that “patients with ILC are under-represented on clinical trials.” Personally speaking, it is necessary to facilitate research to improve patient outcomes in those with

uncommon breast cancer subtypes, such as inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) and invasive lobular carcinoma.

I want to take the time to thank Laurie Burgess Hutcheson and her team at Lobular Breast Cancer Alliance for allowing me to attend this powerful conference of pioneers for breast cancer research and education who are trying to shed some light on scientific research for lobular breast cancer. Since coming home, I continue to educate others on the sneaky nature of my ILC and fight for continuous breast cancer research to combat it. I plan to go on to attend Project LEAD to learn all the science behind breast cancer so I can continue to advance ILC advocacy in the future with authority and insight!