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NEWS RELEASE

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Empowering the Patient Journey: Living Well With Sarcoidosis

Sarcoidosis Research Institute Hosts Free Educational Virtual Conference to Empower Patients April 25, 2026

MEMPHIS, *Tennessee* – The Sarcoidosis Research Institute is pleased to announce a free virtual conference for sarcoidosis patients, their caregivers, medical professionals and others scheduled for April 25, 2026, 1 – 5 p.m. Eastern. This event is designed to provide accessible, expert-led education and foster a supportive community for those affected by sarcoidosis (an inflammatory disease that can affect virtually any region of the body, involving rapid growth of granulomas — inflammatory cells — in concentrated areas).

“Sarcoidosis is a worldwide disease,” says Dr. Ogugua Ndili Obi, Associate Professor, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, and Director of the Sarcoidosis Center of Excellence at East Carolina University and conference presenter. “The incidence varies widely by ethnicity and geography. The disease is more common among Northern Europeans (Scandinavians) and African Americans. Between 150,000 and 200,000 people in the United States have sarcoidosis and there are about 25,000 new cases per year. In the USA, the annual incidence of sarcoidosis in African Americans is three times that of Caucasians.”

Sarcoidosis patients often face significant challenges, including difficulties in obtaining an accurate diagnosis, limited access to expert education and peer support, financial constraints, and gaps in reliable information. These obstacles can make it harder for patients to manage their health and connect with others who understand their experience.

"When I was diagnosed with sarcoidosis in 1981, patient information and education were non-existent, and I didn't know anyone else with the disease," says Sarcoidosis Research Institute Founder Paula Yette Polite. "Five years later, I finally met one person with sarcoidosis, and she passed away shortly thereafter."

The upcoming conference directly addresses these issues by offering expert-led sessions and interactive discussions, all easily accessible online and free of charge. Participants will receive up-to-date information from specialists and have opportunities to share experiences and build connections with peers, helping to bridge informational and social gaps.

Conference attendees will gain practical tools for managing their condition, increase their confidence in self-care, and reduce feelings of isolation. The conference aims to empower participants and promote a sense of community that is vital for long-term wellbeing.

"It has been demonstrated that the best sarcoidosis care is delivered when there is shared decision-making between the sarcoidosis patient and the doctor," says Dr. Marc Judson, Chief, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, Albany Medical College and the Cleveland Clinic, and conference presenter. "This requires sarcoidosis patients to have a good understanding of their disease so they can be active participants in their own care. This event will provide an in-depth description of sarcoidosis, focusing on the manifestations of the disease and the general approach to management."

The conference will also feature a special speaker - Dr. Rhonda McCullough, the widow of the late comedian and actor Bernie Mac, to whom she was married for 31 years until his death on August 9, 2008. She is currently the CEO and president of the Bernie Mac Foundation, dedicated to raising funds and awareness for sarcoidosis, the disease that contributed to his death.

Here's the full list of conference speakers/presenters:

- **Dr. Daniel Culver,** Division Chair of Pulmonary Medicine, Cleveland Clinic
- **Dr. Brianna Gaynor**, Clinical Psychologist, TEDx speaker, and a leading voice in mental health
- **Dr. Marc Judson**, Chief, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, Albany Medical College and the Cleveland Clinic
- **Dr. Ogugua Ndili Obi,** Associate Professor, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, Director Sarcoidosis Center of Excellence at East Carolina University

- **Dr. Lesley Ann Saketkoo,** MD, MPH, Founder, Director, New Orleans Scleroderma & Sarcoidosis Patient Care & Research Center, New Orleans
- **Dr. Michelle Sharp**, Associate Professor, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, Co-Director, Johns Hopkins Sarcoidosis Center; WASOG Sarcoidosis Center of Excellence
- **Kerry Wong,** Columnist - Sarcoidosis News, a Bionews site, and Creator - Kaleidoscope: Rare Disease Stories

Registration is now open - *https://www.sarcoidosisri.org/empowering-the-patient-journey-living-well-with-sarcoidosis/*

All patients, caregivers, medical professionals and interested members of the media are encouraged to join this important event and become part of a supportive, informed community.

“I am filled with gratitude that research initiatives, patient advocacy, and education are now more abundant and accessible. I am thrilled that the Sarcoidosis Research Institute can provide patients with a space to learn more about this disease, feel less isolated, and feel empowered to manage their healthcare," says Polite.

Special thanks to conference sponsors Sarcoidosis News, a Bionews site, and Xentria.

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The Sarcoidosis Research Institute (SRI) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), tax-exempt organization. Over the years, SRI has been an advocate for sarcoidosis patients; hosted patient conferences, support group meetings, and distributed educational materials to patients, their families, networks, and support systems. Inspired by her personal challenges experienced as a sarcoidosis patient, SRI was initially founded in 1991 by Paula Yette Polite. https://www.sarcoidosisri.org/