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## Pulmonary Fibrosis Champion's Last Hope

Staring Down Death, Publicist Spreads Word for Little-Known Lung Ailment that Kills 40,000 a Year

By David W Freeman

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**(CBS)** Veteran publicist Bob O'Rourke is in the midst of what could be his last PR campaign, trying to spread the word about a devastating but little-known lung condition - pulmonary fibrosis - before it kills him.



Robert O'Rourke (Personal Photo)

O'Rourke, a long-time publicist for the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Calif., was diagnosed with the disease in 2006 and has been on the waiting list for a lung transplant at UCLA since June 10. He's on oxygen 24/7 and having increasing difficulty getting around. If a suitable donor isn't found soon, he says he's unlikely to survive.

So he's going to do what he can to draw attention to the disease - and promote more research on it - while there's still time.

"I hope that by sharing my story, I can help change things in this horrible disease," O'Rourke said in a written statement issued by the **Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis**. "Recognition and awareness are key drivers in finding treatments and a cure for PF. It has worked well in breast cancer and AIDS, and it can work here. We just have to keep fighting - and I'll fight as long as I have breath."

O'Rourke has been speaking with reporters and making television appearances, including one on the Today Show Tuesday morning. There's also an active "**We Love Bob O'Rourke**" page on Facebook.

Some cases of pulmonary fibrosis are apparently caused by long exposure to tobacco smoke or other airborne toxins. Others, including Bob's, have no obvious cause.

The condition kills as many Americans as breast cancer - more than 40,000 a year, according to the coalition. It's 100 percent fatal unless a lung transplant can be arranged, but that happens in less than one percent of patients. On average, people with PF die within three years of diagnosis.

But Bob is not one to be deterred by long odds.

"The determination and focus Bob has for this is utterly amazing," says Mischka Michon, the coalition's chief executive officer. "He clearly is a man on a mission and is dedicated to making a difference in this disease as long as he possibly can."

O'Rourke remains optimistic about his own chances of survival.

"Every time the phone rings and UCLA comes up, I say, 'Oh, God, it must be the lung people,'" he told CBS News. "I'm feeling very positive."