



News from Mount Sinai's Breast Health Resource Program

among

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Breast Health Resource Program

The Breast Health Resource Program mission is to help women and their families cope with a diagnosis of breast cancer. A team of dedicated professionals and volunteers is available to assist you in a very private, cozy and quiet setting. Help is available to better understand the illness, treatment options and the challenges of a breast cancer diagnosis. The program offers one-on-one counseling, seminars, support groups, as well as an extensive library with access to information about the latest treatments.

From insurance concerns to family issues, our social workers, Andrea Geduld, Mary Delaney and Fran Epstein will be your knowledgeable guides and advisors. Our group of committed volunteers, most of them, breast cancer survivors, will also welcome, encourage and support you. The kindness and warm atmosphere sets the tone of the program, but most importantly, all of your questions will be answered. If you or someone you care about is coping with a new diagnosis, undergoing treatment or dealing with life post treatment, please contact us. We are a phone call away and we know we can help.

Our phone number is 212-987-3063.

Our fax number is 212-987-6322.

Our Web site is www.mountsinai.org/breasthealth

A Poem From The Heart

Personal note from the editor

Rochelle's story is our collective story; the news, the disbelief, the journey.

I recently read her poem and though my breast cancer was diagnosed eight years ago, her words had immediate impact today. The poem transported me instantly back in time to the chemotherapy treatments, the hair loss, the pain and the roller coaster of emotions.

Best of all, I found myself enjoying her humor. What an accomplishment to laugh at your own suffering. I once read; "If you are going through hell, keep on going" and that is just what I did...

Rochelle writes about the changes in her life: the chaos, the adjustments, the importance of friends and family, the fight and the ultimate achievement of dignity and inner peace.

Each of us has a unique story. Every journey is so different yet so similar. As Rochelle's life is "rearranged", she feels so close to the next one when unfortunately it is her turn.

Our collective experience and knowledge can ease the process for the next person and give to them the support to conquer the fear of the illness. Our mission is to give women the knowledge of possible options so that they may empower themselves.

Perhaps you would share your story, your experiences in our next newsletter. We welcome your comments, your poems, and your words.

Please contact the editor at 212-987-3063.

Rochelle's Poem

It was Tuesday, May 28th 2002
I was having my mammogram because it was due
Imagine my shock and complete surprise
As my doctor couldn't believe what was before her eyes

Breast cancer was not what I had in mind
Colon cancer was certainly more my kind
How could this happen to a woman like me
Breast cancer is non discriminatory—it knows no boundary

My life was thrown into chaos, crisis and transformation
Margins, lymph nodes and biopsies became my conversation
And just when I thought it couldn't get any worse
Mastectomy and chemo became my new verse

The chemo had to be given quick and strong
And then it didn't take long
17 days later, I truly was in despair
17 days later, I had lost all my hair

Telling me with great zest, that my old breasts were never
winning any beauty contest!
It would have been impossible to get through this alone
Without the support and inspiration from friends in person
or on the phone
I was thrown into my fate with no instruction
Little did I realize I would end up with a breast reduction!

So now I'm perky as can be
But when I hear the word "Survivor" it has a different con-
notation for me
When life throws you lemons, you make lemonade
And I'm beginning to learn that bad memories do fade

When my children asked me what I wanted for Mother's Day
A comb and mascara was all I had to say
Because it was God who gave me my biggest gift
I went through chemo without ever being sick

You can go through life and never be changed
Or you can have your life unexpectedly rearranged
In a way this day is allowing me to release
So I may continue my next step with strength, dignity and peace

I was a woman who put emphasis on looks
Did I have enough substance – had I read enough books
Would people be comfortable – could they look me in the eye
Or would they be thinking, "If it were me, I'd want to die"

The shame and humiliation that I went through
Known only to a special few
The stupid calls from people wanting to meet me to see
God forgive me, how I wished it was them and not me
My life was in disarray, but I made a vow
That my three children would never know how
Difficult it was to go that extra mile

Sabbath dinners at our home were a sight to see
David, Jason, Jeffery, Stefanie, Casper and little bald me
Each week with a different colored ribbon on my head
Each week with so much love unspoken, unsaid

I was fortunate to have David by my side
Strong and supportive during that bumpy ride
Never making me feel self conscious, in fact

You dear friends have been a part of my fight
Many of you have helped me make it through the night
This language of experience I've just begun to learn
Will enable me to help the next one, when it unfortunately is
their turn

You can go through life and never be changed
Or you can have your life unexpectedly rearranged
In a way this day is allowing me to release
So I may continue my next step with strength, dignity and
peace

Like the man of La Mancha, I've had my quest
Little did I know, it would be my breasts
And so when I dream the Impossible Dream
It is for health and happiness and all that they mean.

Rochelle Hirsch / June 12, 2003

To submit your own creative writing, fax 212-987-6322
Please include your contact information.

Your Questions Our Answers

Before writing this newsletter, I met with many of the support group members to learn about their expectations for a perfect newsletter. Most requested easy ways to access information relevant to their own diagnostic and treatment issues.

In each issue, we will publish a sample of the most frequently asked questions.

Most Asked Questions

“Will I need to have my breast removed?” Not necessarily. Nearly all women with breast cancer will have some type of surgery.

Lumpectomy removes only the breast lump and the surrounding area, or margin, of normal tissue. In almost all cases, 6 to 7 weeks radiation therapy will follow the lumpectomy. Doctors call this breast conserving therapy. Lumpectomy, as it is also called, is an option for most women with breast cancer. Some patients will be offered the option of a mastectomy (total removal of the breast and nipple) as a treatment choice. This option is recommended when the cancer is found in numerous areas or when it is impossible to achieve clean margins. There are also some types of breast cancer that may be most effectively treated by removal of the breast. As of January 1, 1998, health insurance policies providing medical and surgical coverage in New York State are required to pay for costs of breast reconstruction after surgery for breast cancer.

“Should I tell my children or my aging parents about my breast cancer diagnosis?” Children, our parents and those who love us the most can sense when something is wrong. Honesty and providing accurate information is crucial to maintaining wholesome relationships. We all must struggle between protecting those we love and self-preservation. Timing and sensitivity to your own readiness to cope with the reactions and concerns of others is essential. It may be helpful to “practice telling” in a safe setting such as a cancer support group or with caring friends.

These web sites offer more information on these and other topics:

www.cancer.org www.nccn.org www.BreastCancerInfo.com www.cancer.gov/cancer www.oncolink.upenn.edu

The Outreach Experience

Friday morning, 9:00 am, the group meets on 115th Street on the sidewalk. It looks like we are moving in, a suitcase, huge bags... Something exciting is happening. At this early hour, everyone is smiling and happy to be present. Sister Suzanne welcomes Mary, the social worker, Andrea R, Sarah and Myrna, our health education team, Betty, Louise, Maria and Ramona, our volunteer team. We have half an hour to transform two offices into comfortable and private examining rooms. Now we are rolling... It is done, the suitcase, the bags are empty, the rooms are ready, thirty women have arrived, they came with their children age three months to six years old—A full room of them— It could be a nightmare, but, in fact, it is a dream. The oldest children play with the volunteers while their mothers are educated on the three part Breast Health Program; breast self-examination, clinical breast exam and mammography. In the other rooms, our two doctors, who have generously given of their time, are providing clinical breast exams. Two of our Spanish-speaking volunteers assist them. It is beautifully orchestrated. Forty patients have met with the doctor and social worker. It is only 12:30, and Sister Suzanne, gently asks us, “If?”, and, “Yes, we will.” Forty-five will be the final number of women to receive breast health screening today. There is a sense of accomplishment among the team. We know how important it is to spread the information and offer our services in a community where women rarely have the opportunity to consult a doctor. It is 2:00 pm. we are packing the suitcase and talking about where our next outreach visit will be. It certainly was a fine day!

Mount Sinai’s Community Breast Health Program

This model program combines the Breast Health experts of Mount Sinai’s Medical Center and delivers a three part program of Breast Self Exam, Clinical Breast Exam and Mammography Screening. Call for more information.

The Lucky Wig

Twelve years ago Nancy was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was an executive in a major retail store and, as you can imagine, personal appearance was a priority. After her surgery, she was told she would need chemotherapy, and would lose her beautiful blond hair. The news was devastating. She did not want to talk about her illness and did not want to look different. The solution was an extremely expensive wig which would enable her to continue to look as she usually did. Her wish was to keep up appearances and to continue to be both a buyer and a mom. The wig she bought was sensational. She continued wearing her wig until her hair was the same length as the wig so that the change would go unnoticed at the end of the treatment. Four years later, it was my turn. The wig, however, was blond and I have reddish hair. We colored it and the wig had a new owner.

After my treatment, I too put away the wig waiting for the next owner to be revealed. Soon enough a friend of a friend was diagnosed and needed to talk. The question of the wig came up. “Is it lucky?” she asked. “Of course it is,” I reply. She was blond, and back to blond went the wig. It is now in California and I am waiting to hear of its color! As we give the wig, we ask the new owner to pass it on when it is no longer needed.

The tale of the wig is an example of the solidarity between women. There is also a story about pajamas that are personalized with each patient’s initials. If you have a story you would like to share, we would welcome it.

Support Groups

Bilingual Latina Group: A support group for women who speak Spanish to receive support and learn about breast cancer.

Every other Wednesday 10:30 – 12:00

Building Knowledge: A drop-in support group with special emphasis on treatment options and the skills needed for coping with the physical and emotional stress of breast cancer.

Every Thursday 10:30 – 12:00

Beyond Decision Making: Support for women coping with a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Every other Wednesday 5:00 – 6:30

Building Lives: The focus is on women "moving on" after treatment.

Every other Monday 4:30 – 6:00

Breast Friends: Support for women dealing with the issues of survivorship.

Every other Tuesday 6:30 – 8:00

Blue Ribbon Club: For men coping with their own breast cancer diagnosis.

Date and time T B A.

PLEASE CALL TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL GROUPS: **212-987-3063**

Programs

The Mount Sinai Healthy Lifestyle Program: This innovative educational series promotes well-being and recovery through the practice of healthy nutrition, regular exercise, stress management and psychosocial support.

Registration begins August 9th

September 9th – December 9th 6:00 – 7:45

WISH (Women In Search of Health): An education and support group for women who have learned through genetic testing that they carry a BRCA mutation. Participation helps women develop an informed and personal response to the difficult decisions that they may face.

Once a month Monday Evenings 6:00 – 7:30

The Breast Health Resource Program Speakers Bureau: Staff, breast care experts and survivor volunteers are available for lectures, presentations, and programs at your community/workplace site.

To Learn more about our program, please call 212-987-3063

Special Events

A Delicate Balance, Pleasure, Intimacy and Breast Cancer

Join Dr. Jill Fishbane-Mayer, Gynecologist, Mount Sinai Medical Center and Miriam Baker, PH.D, CSW, Sex Therapist to discuss and explore the very important issues of relationships, sexuality, menopause and hormone replacement after breast cancer. The program will be generously supported by Aventis and Ortho Biotech.

Wednesday, October 20th, 2004, 6:00 PM

Hatch Auditorium at the Mount Sinai Medical Center.

For more information and to register call 212 987-3063

Celebration of Life Benefit 2004: Proceeds from this event will benefit The Mount Sinai Breast Health Resource Program. We provide psychosocial, educational, and supportive services to breast cancer patients throughout the continuum of diagnosis, treatment and recovery. Physicians, nurses, social workers, administrators, and volunteers work together to provide the necessary treatment and emotional support for patients and their families coping with a diagnosis of breast cancer.

Wednesday, October 13th, 2004, 7:00 PM, Plaza Hotel

For more information, please call 212-267-9474

Donor Information

The Mount Sinai Breast Health Resource Program is dedicated to meeting the emotional and practical needs of men and women with breast cancer. Our patient services and research projects are funded through the generous gifts from individuals, corporations, and foundations. If you would like to help support our program, please send donations to:

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