

SURVIVORSHIP

A NEW INITIATIVE IN BREAST CANCER

by Dr. Anne Moore

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Women diagnosed with breast cancer over the last 20 years have an excellent chance of living a normal lifespan after the diagnosis. The improvement in early diagnosis due to mammography and the prompt treatment with surgery, along with radiation, chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy if needed, have led to a steady decrease in deaths from breast cancer. Over two million women in the United States are living, and living well,



Dr. Linda Vahdat, CR&T Medical Advisory Board

after a diagnosis of breast cancer. In 2005, the Institute of Medicine issued a report, "From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition" focusing our attention on these "survivors". Although these patients have finished most of their active therapy for the disease, their problems are not over. They struggle with important physical and psychological issues that impact on their quality of life. The Institute of Medicine report challenged us to address these issues and to pay more attention. We have responded with a program for survivorship at the Weill Cornell Breast Center.

Our program is designed to improve support for our survivors as well as to study important survivorship issues. Our first symposium for survivors was held on March 6. Over 170 patients came and we discussed the importance of life style issues such as diet, alcohol, and exercise. Dr. Robert Schulman of our Department of Physical Medicine discussed vitamins, herbs and acupuncture



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and Dr. Linda Vahdat discussed new research. Some of this exciting new research presented by Dr. Vahdat is supported by a grant from Cancer Research & Treatment Fund. We did a yoga exercise and a meditation exercise with the participants and our Nurse Practitioner outlined the importance of a written care summary and follow up plan to be shared with patients and all the doctors involved in their care.

Our research in this area involves both clinical and basic science studies. We have over one hundred women enrolled in a national clinical trial studying the question of the role of bisphosphonates (bone strengthening medicines) in preventing breast cancer metastases. With our rheumatology colleagues at the Hospital for Special Surgery, we have just completed a study of joint symptoms in women taking the commonly prescribed aromatase inhibitors such as anastrozole (Arimidex) or letrozole (Femara). Our premenopausal patients receiving chemotherapy are particularly concerned about fertility and Dr. Tessa Cigler co-chairs a study of markers of ovarian reserve to see if we can predict the chance of future pregnancy for these young women. Under the direction of Dr. Linda Vahdat, we are studying whether an inhibitor of angiogenesis (new blood vessel formation) can interfere with the cellular process that initiates metastasis. Dr. Ellen Chuang is studying possible molecular predictors of heart damage which may help us tailor our post operative therapies even more accurately.

As the treatments for breast cancer get better and better, we look forward to expanding our studies in the survivorship area.



Breast Cancer Symposium