

life TO THE FULLEST

Winter 2010

Happy Holidays and Welcome to the Winter 2010 issue of Life to the Fullest, the Swedish Cancer Institute's newsletter for cancer survivors in our community. In this issue we have included articles about avoiding stress during the holidays and making the transition from treatment to survivor. We have also included information about our After Breast Cancer group and Life after Treatment class, and all of our ongoing classes and support groups. We hope you will find the newsletter helpful and that you will consider sharing it with your family and friends.

Navigate your holidays with wisdom and love

Carolyn McManus, P.T., M.S., M.A.



In a recent poll, 41 percent of those surveyed rated holidays as stressful, women described the holidays as stressful far more often than men, and financial concerns were the number one cause of holiday stress. How can

you limit stress and have more fun during the holidays?

- 1. Presence not presents.** Avoid getting caught up in the message that expensive gifts are a sign of love. Your undivided attention and caring presence is your greatest gift to those you care about. Never underestimate or diminish the lasting gift of your heart's love.
- 2. Happiness on YOUR terms.** Unrealistic expectations promoted by advertisers undermine the possibility of achieving happiness during the holidays. Therefore, avoid judging your holiday based on a magazine image. Be realistic. Make your holidays uniquely your own. Create a celebration around what matters most to you.
- 3. One day at a time.** Drink plenty of water. Start a holiday exercise tradition. Breathe deeply throughout the day and especially when you feel rushed or stressed. Listen to relaxing music. Keep

healthy snacks nearby, and avoid overdoing sweets and alcohol.

- 4. Rest to enjoy.** Extra shopping, cooking, cleaning and holiday events can make you more tired than usual. Schedule time for a nap or go to bed a little early so you are able to enjoy the holidays.
- 5. Pace and delegate.** Make a conscious, realistic choice about the activities in which you will participate. Trying to "do it all" can be exhausting. Be willing to say "no" and to share holiday preparations and responsibilities.
- 6. Norman Rockwell moments.** Most families are not like a Norman Rockwell painting. They are messy with personal conflicts, disappointments, unresolved grievances and losses that become painfully amplified during the holidays. Learn to love the mess or at least to accept that your family may never be perfect. Make an effort to see the good in people.

Mindfulness Meditation at the Frye Art Museum

Take a moment out of your busy holiday schedule to join Carolyn McManus at the Frye Art Museum (704 Terry St., Seattle) for a free Mindfulness Meditation session. Relax, regroup, de-stress.

Wednesday, Dec. 22, 12:30-1 p.m.
Wednesday, Dec. 29, 12:30-1 p.m.

All sessions are held in the Frye Auditorium. Registration is not required – just stop by. The Frye Art Museum offers free parking.

Continued on next page

7. Feel what you feel. There is an overwhelming emphasis on “happy” holidays. During the holidays it is normal to feel grief and sadness, as well as happiness – especially if you have lost a loved one or are experiencing difficult family circumstances. Be kind to yourself and accept your feelings. Seek support and comfort from family, a friend or a professional if needed.

8. Enjoy the journey. People often focus their attention on one day or one event. In the process they miss the little things that happen along the way that can contribute to their happiness and personal fulfillment. There is no gift like the present. Each present moment gives us a unique opportunity to experience life and share our love. 

The Journey from Treatment to Survival

How individuals respond to the diagnosis, treatment and survival of cancer is as similar – and as unique – as the snowflakes in a December storm. From a distance, it may appear that every snowflake is the same. But under magnification, we quickly see that each flake has a beauty and character all its own.

So, too, with cancer survivors. The journey from treatment to survival is uniquely personal. Of course there are similarities and common experiences; and, many people tend to generalize when trying to understand what a cancer survivor is going through. In reality, though, how an individual responds depends on his or her very personal view of past experiences and expectations for the future.

What's next?

Cancer treatment can be all consuming – and also somewhat comforting. It can be mentally, as well as physically, exhausting – leaving the patient with little reservoir to deal with anything other than fighting the cancer. It can, however, also bring a sense of solace and provide a reassuring feeling of participation in the curing process. It is only after treatment ends rather abruptly that the patient regains the energy, interest or need to ask “What’s next? What do I want my life after treatment to look like?” This is also the time when the patient – now a survivor – may experience a great void.

The transition from the last day of treatment to embracing survivorship takes time. It is a personal journey that the individual alone controls. During this transition one thing becomes evident – there will be a new “normal” to the survivor’s life. For some, that might mean returning to a similar daily routine from the past. For others, it might be a combination of baby steps, strides and leaps into the future – with starts and stops along the way.

Right now?

There is no right or wrong way to fill the after-treatment void and transition into the next phase of the journey; nor is there a standard time line. It is, however, important to recognize initially the need for “healing” after the “curing” has ended. Taking time to reflect on life before cancer and the cancer experience, as well as investing in self-care practices, can be a valuable way of coming to terms with the ways cancer has changed your life.

Changes that may need to be addressed may include body image and sexuality, as well as employment, nutrition, fitness, spirituality, a sense of purpose and relationships with family and friends. Change also may mean finding ways to accommodate limitations in range of motion, skin sensitivity or energy level.

“Coming to terms with the emotional upheaval and physical changes cancer brings is the first step in building a new normal,” says **Jacci Thompson-Dodd**, oncology social worker and facilitator of the ‘After Breast Cancer’ support group. “By solidifying this base, the tasks involved in renegotiating relationships, redefining a healing social network and redesigning a more doable work schedule become easier to orchestrate.”

It's a bird. It's a plane. It's ...

No. You aren’t a superhero who vanquished cancer. Recognize you are still you – but with new experiences, life skills and priorities in life. Be kind to yourself and accept that there will be days when you don’t have the desire or energy to deal with other people’s stuff. Give yourself permission to step away or to say “no” to the demands others may place on you – and to say “yes” to yourself. That may mean setting aside “me time” in a place you designate as your “healing place” where

Continued on next page

you can off-load what's unimportant and focus on your personal journey. It also may mean seeking support from others who have made – or are making – similar journeys from treatment to survival.

Most importantly, be confident that you are on the right path and the changes you want to make in your life are good changes. Although friends and family members may find it confusing or hard to accept at first, they will learn and adjust. And you will be on your way to being a survivor. 

If nothing ever changed, there would be no butterflies.
– Anonymous

Save the Date

Third Annual Swedish Cancer Survivors Event

Saturday, June 4, 9 a.m. to noon

Mark your calendars. Plan to attend and bring a family member or friend.

- Informative workshops by experts from the Swedish Cancer Institute, and local and national organizations
 - Lifestyle and educational exhibits
- Opportunities to share personal stories and experiences

This event is free to participants, but registration will be required. You won't want to miss this opportunity to celebrate life to the fullest. Stay tuned for more information. Once details have been finalized, registration information will be available online at www.swedish.org/classes 

After Breast Cancer: A Survivor's GPS

The After Breast Cancer group at Swedish Cancer Institute is more than a group; it is a refuge for women who are adjusting to what many perceive to have been a catastrophic life event. Instructor **Jacci Thompson-Dodd, M.A., MSSS**, has created a safe haven for women to share thoughts they might not share with anyone else. The class is also a roadmap – or GPS – for women who want to redefine their lives now that they are breast-cancer survivors.

Jacci uses “Sankofa,” a West African saying that literally means “go back and retrieve,” as a way for participants to reflect on and bring closure to their cancer experience, and to begin rebuilding their lives and setting new courses for their futures. Through this self-investigation process survivors learn how to create the “new normal” for their lives.

There are eight modules that comprise the curriculum that helps women learn how to define their journey from treatment to survivor.

1. What now? A time to examine the past and plan for the future
2. Self-care. Uncovering barriers to a new future (fear, family demands, financial issues, etc.)
3. Renegotiating relationships. Rebuilding a personal community through crucial conversations
4. Physical nourishment. Beneficial foods, exercise and lifestyle changes
5. Intimacy. How to feel comfortable in your own skin; rebuilding a sense of sensuality; re-engaging with a partner – or finding a new partner
6. Self-assessment. An exercise to help determine what can remain the same and what must change
7. Creating a survivorship plan. Using the results of the self-assessment to map the future by identifying the small steps and strides, and the leaps that will require a significant effort
8. Culmination. Returning to Sankofa to witness the progress made during the eight weeks

Through group discussions, self-assessment, journaling, and the development of vision maps and survivorship plans, Jacci leads group members through the critical transition from treatment to survivor.

After Breast Cancer is more than a support group – it's a personal construction zone. A time to rebuild and remodel what cancer tried to destroy – a time to embrace change as the energy for a new tomorrow. 

After Breast Cancer

(Jacci Thompson-Dodd)

- An 8-week series
- Each session is 90 minutes

For more information or to register, go to www.swedish.org/classes

Improving Health through Yoga

The practice of yoga as a form of meditation, relaxation and exercise has existed for thousands of years. Yoga teaches us to focus on our mind – our body – and our spirit. In the process we learn how to relax, meditate and to perform gentle, yet effective, exercises.

Gentle Yoga

When: Every Thursday from 3:30 to 4:30 for five weeks beginning Jan. 27 and continuing through Feb. 24

Where: Swedish/First Hill – Donald A. Tesh, M.D., Conference Rooms A and B

What to Bring: Bring a mat and blanket.

Registration required: www.swedish.org/classes

In recent years studies have shown that this type of self-focus can be beneficial to cancer patients as they struggle with multiple treatment- and recovery-related

issues. Several studies showed marked improvement in the quality of sleep of cancer patients who regularly performed yoga. It also helped these individuals with mood, stress, cancer-related symptoms and distress, and their overall quality of life.

Swedish is pleased to offer its five-week Gentle Yoga class every Thursday from 3:30 to 4:30 for five weeks beginning Jan. 27. The class is held on the Swedish/First Hill campus in the Donald A. Tesh, M.D., conference rooms A and B. Special attention is paid to physical limitations and to teaching relaxation, breathing and stretching techniques that will benefit cancer patients for years to come.

Go to www.swedish.org/classes to register for Gentle Yoga 

Fighting Cancer Every Day in Every Way

Are you embracing every opportunity to fight cancer? Do you know what the latest research says about beneficial foods, exercise and lifestyle habits? Join health educator **Carol Robl, M.Ed., M.T.**, for the Anticancer Lifestyle class hosted by Swedish Cancer

Institute. Learn how to protect yourself from dietary and environmental threats, and to enhance your physical and emotional well being. Make cancer unwelcome in your life – and the lives of your family members. There is no cost for this class; however, registration is required. Sign up today for the Anticancer Lifestyle class at www.swedish.org/classes. 

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 6-8 p.m.
Swedish Lakeside
(6520 226th Place Southeast)

Life after Treatment

Swedish Cancer Institute is pleased to offer a special three-part class, Life after Treatment, to help cancer survivors, and their friends and families face the future after treatment.

The class is offered at no cost to participants, and includes opportunities for individuals to share their own experiences and to hear about and discuss various survivorship topics. Instructor **Carol Robl, M.Ed., M.T.**, includes topics such as recent research on the challenges cancer survivors may face and the strategies to deal with those challenges, how to lead an “anti-cancer” lifestyle, and the process of healing the whole person.

Those who attend the class learn how to create an action plan that will help them through their transition. Multiple resources are also made available to participants, including published materials, an up-to-date reading list, websites and information about organizations that provide support.

For more information about this special opportunity for cancer survivors or to register for the next series of classes, go to www.swedish.org/classes. 

Life after Treatment (3-class series)

(Carol Robl, M.Ed., M.T.)

When: Feb. 1, 8, 15; 7-8:30 p.m.
Where: Issaquah Library
(10 W. Sunset Way)
Cost: No cost to participants
For more information or to register, please call 206-386-2502 or go to www.swedish.org/classes.

Continued on next page

Spotlight on Sharing

Swedish Cancer Support Groups

The Swedish Cancer Institute offers a variety of support groups for cancer survivors, and their families and caregivers. Support groups give you an opportunity to meet with and find extra strength from others, to share your experiences and, possibly, even help someone who might be struggling with a challenge you have learned to overcome. Each group has the benefit of an experienced Swedish Cancer Institute support group facilitator, and all groups are open to anyone in the community – whether they are receiving care at Swedish Cancer Institute or at another cancer center in the community. The Cancer Institute is fortunate to be able to provide this valuable service at no cost to the participants. For more information about the following support groups, where they meet and whether registration is required, please call **206-540-0477**.

After Breast Cancer – What’s Next?: An eight-week group for women who are preparing to live life after breast-cancer treatment. The group meets on Wednesdays, from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Advance registration is required. There are three eight-week sessions scheduled from January through November 2011.

- Jan. 12-March 2
- March 23-May 11
- Sept. 28-Nov. 16

Living with Cancer Support Group: This group for those living with any type of cancer meets weekly on Thursdays, from 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Brain Tumor Support Group: This group for individuals diagnosed with a brain tumor and those who care for them meets the first and third Wednesdays of the month, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., in the Swedish/Cherry Hill James Tower, 550 17th Ave., Education and Conference Center, Room E.

Brain Tumor Caregivers Support Group: This drop-in group for caregivers of brain-tumor patients meets the first Wednesday of the month, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Advance registration is not required.

Caregivers Support Group: This drop-in group for caregivers meets weekly on Thursday, from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Advance registration is not required.

Gynecological Cancers Support Group: This group for women with gynecological cancers meets weekly on Tuesday, from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Prostate Cancer Educational Support Group: This group meets the third Thursday of the month, from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., in the Swedish Cancer Institute (A West Conference Room C). For more information, please call **Leo Ward**, prostate cancer survivor, at **425-957-7440**. 

Focus on Education

Healing through Creating

Art therapy and knitting can be healing experiences that help restore the spirit of cancer survivors. Swedish Cancer Institute offers two opportunities for cancer patients to participate in these activities. For more information or to register for these free sessions, please call 206-386-3200.

Art Therapy: An Approach for Healing

Prior art experience or training is not required for individuals who would like to participate in these confidential, supportive and individualized sessions. The goal of art therapy is to use various art mediums to visually and verbally examine health issues through self-exploration. **Nicole Stiver**, a registered art therapist, offers 50-minute appointments that can be scheduled on Tuesdays or Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., or on Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Knit for Life™

A network of volunteers uses knitting as a healing experience to enhance the lives of cancer patients, their families and caregivers. The group provides a supportive environment for beginning and experienced knitters. Materials are provided. The group meets Mondays, from 6-8 p.m., on Swedish/Cherry Hill campus, and on Thursdays, from 1-3 p.m. on Swedish/First Hill campus. 

Continued on next page

About our Authors



Carolyn McManus, P.T., M.S., M.A., coordinates the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program for the Outpatient Rehab Services at Swedish Medical Center. This meditation, stress reduction and gentle exercise program is designed for people with chronic pain and disease, and stress-related

symptoms. Carolyn received a master's in physical therapy from Duke University and a master's in psychology from Antioch University. She has served as a consultant and instructor in mindfulness research funded by National Institutes of Health (NIH). Carolyn has been at Swedish since 1998. She speaks locally and nationally on the role of mindfulness in health, and has produced multiple CDs about meditation and relaxation.

Contributor



Jacci Thompson-Dodd, M.A., MSSW, is an author, publisher, health educator and medical social worker. She received two master's degrees from Boston University – a master of science in social service and a master of arts in Afro-American studies.

She developed the curriculum and leads the After Breast Cancer group for breast cancer survivors at the Swedish Cancer Institute, and volunteers as an oncology social worker for the Comprehensive Breast Center at Swedish/Cherry Hill. She serves on several panels for the National Cancer Institute and on the Minority Women's Health Panel of Experts for the Office on Women's Health. Jacci is the author of the book "WHOLE: 12 Principles for Rebuilding Life after Breast Cancer", and is the founder and chief executive of WeSpeakLoudly, a women's health education firm. 

Share the News and Your Ideas

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of *Life to the Fullest* and that you will consider sharing it with your friends and family members. Anyone can join our mailing list by sending his or her name and e-mail address to full.life@swedish.org.

We also encourage you to let us know about topics you would like us to include in future issues or questions you would like answered by our experts at the Swedish Cancer Institute. Send your ideas and questions to full.life@swedish.org.