



Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

Supporting women with breast or gynecologic cancer concerns

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Ask Dr. Julie

Dr. Julie Ohnemus, HCBHP Founder & Medical Consultant.
Family Practitioner, Open Door Community Health Centers.



Radiation causes cancer, right? Then isn't it risky to have mammograms every year? Wouldn't I be better off with just having my doctor check me for a lump, or doing it myself? —"Independent"

I'm five years out from gynecologic cancer surgery and treatment (chemotherapy and radiation). My doctor says I should stop having CTs and MRIs because the radiation increases my risk for a secondary cancer. But I am scared that I'll have a recurrence and not know about it. What do I need to know to make the right choice? —"Lucky"

Dear *Independent* & *Lucky* —

You are each being your own best medical advocate when you inquire if a test is necessary, and then weigh the known risks and benefits to you as an individual. It is equally important to gather information from non-biased reliable sources.

There are two camps of opinion on the question of radiation and the safety of annual mammograms. Fortunately there is a non-profit organization, the Health Physics Society (www.hps.org), whose mission is to study the science and practice of radiation safety and to protect and inform the public.

Mammograms can detect breast cancers in the early stages, on average 1-3 years before you or a health practitioner can feel them. Women over 50 who receive regular mammograms have a 30% reduced risk of death from breast cancer. This is largely because, when breast cancer is caught early, it is very survivable. So, *Independent*, you can see why the recommendation is for all women, beginning by age 40, to have a mammogram annually.

Congratulations, *Lucky*, on coming through treatment and moving on with your life. It's important to find your comfort zone with post-cancer follow up.

We know that radiation can cause cancer by injuring the DNA or genetic material in cells. The extent of the damage is dependent on the dosage of radiation received, and individual body parts vary in susceptibility. Fortunately our bodies do have an ability to repair damage from radiation.

After 50 years of studies we have an increased understanding of safe radiation doses. In a normal environment,

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A Couple's Journey



Claire Piccinelli and her husband, Scott Bliss, first came to the Breast Health Project

in May from their home in Redway after Claire's breast biopsy indicated she had cancer. Her physician had referred them to the Project. Prior to her diagnosis they had known HCBHP only because they regularly bought raffle tickets from Nancy Noll. Since then Claire has been to the Project at least 20 times.

"A breast cancer diagnosis can transform your life in 24 hours," said Scott. "It changes everything." Claire thinks that Scott adjusted to the diagnosis more quickly than she did. "I was concerned about the changes it would bring about in my life. How will it affect my work as a teacher? How serious is my cancer, will I be okay? What treatment will I need and how will it impact my life?" And she wondered why she had gotten breast cancer; she had maintained a healthy life style. She said the "fog" lifted only after she understood her diagnosis and formulated a treatment plan.

When they first came to HCBHP they were surprised. "I thought it would be more formal," said Claire. "It feels more like a family than an organization." Claire says that the Project is a

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5 people who email us before October 1st will win our beautiful Holly-Yashi earnings. If you don't receive email, please call to arrange to receive a newsletter.

Ask Dr. Julie, *continued from pg. 1*

people are exposed to 3-5 mSV/yr of radiation from cosmic rays, radon gas in their homes, computer and TV screens. A mammogram series delivers 0.40 mSV, barely half the radiation exposure from a 7-hour airplane flight. A woman having mammograms annually would have an additional cancer risk at age 70 of 0.048%, which barely changes the normal incidence of cancer. The radiation dosage of mammography is regulated by federal law, and facilities are certified.

Cancer can occur decades after exposure to radiation, and it is the annual accumulative dosage over time that counts. The amount of radiation from a CT scan will vary depending on the area of the scan (about 6mSV for a pelvic scan to 14mSV for a pelvic/abdominal); and the type of scan (CT or PET/CT); and also on the machine used. The accumulative dose from multiple CT scans can add up; however I must emphasize the importance of considering the potential benefits contrasted to the risk in each case individually. At www.xrayrisk.com you can track your accumulative radiation exposure and estimate your risk of cancer from medical imaging.

There are steps you can take to lessen radiation accumulation: 1) do imaging only when necessary and for good reasons; 2) when possible utilize ultrasound or MRI, which don't use radiation; 3) track your accumulative radiation dosing so it is part of the decision-making; 4) ask your radiology center to utilize all precautions to deliver the lowest dosage feasible (information is available at www.imagegently.org).

I'm glad that you are both making decisions based on information, not fear.

What questions would you like to see Dr. Julie answer in future columns? Email askdrjulie@hcbhp.org or call 825-8345. For a fuller answer to these questions go to www.hcbhp.org.

Dear Friends,



Our newsletter looks different, doesn't it? We are moving much of our communications to e-mail and our website, and this will be our last newsletter mailing. This is one example of the budget cuts we are making in order to preserve our core services. We want to stay in touch with you, so please give us your e-mail address.

Did you hear that together we raised nearly \$65,000 with the Vacation Raffle? This is amazing in our economy. Thanks for all those raffle tickets you bought. And thanks to all the volunteers.

This year is a challenging one for nonprofits on the North-coast. Over the past year, we have looked ahead and taken the action needed to responsibly steward our budget. This meant total cuts of 40%, bringing us to an annual budget of \$190,000. The largest impacts were to our outreach program and to services for Latinas — if you can help in these areas please contact us. This chart shows you our budget for 2009. You can see why YOUR SUPPORT is so important.



The need for our services hasn't diminished. People facing a breast or gynecologic cancer diagnosis walk through our doors or call on the phone every day. With the help of our dedicated and skilled staff and warmline volunteers, they find information and support — and hope. Our support groups, library, breast nest and chemo kits help too. HCBHP accomplishes a lot with a limited budget.

Not many communities have a resource like this. Your generous donations of volunteer time and money have kept us strong. We have some entertaining fundraisers coming up. Please join us if you can!

Rose Gale-Zoellick, Executive Director

For your acts of kindness,
and the many ways you support our programs and our clients,
we are forever grateful to . . .

Volunteers • Community Members • Local Businesses • Medical Providers

Foundations: Arcata Foundation, Green Diamond Resource Co., Humboldt Area Foundation,
Humboldt Redwood Co., McLean Foundation, Sisters of St Joseph, Trinidad Trust.

*If you would like to join our family of supporters
please call 825-8345 or visit our website www.hcbhp.org*

Volunteering with Vicky & Lindsey



Vicky Dodge and Lindsey Fuller share an office at the top of the stairs. Vicky came to volunteer at just the right moment. The Project needed someone to coordinate volunteers, serve as a warmliner and organize special events, and she was willing to do it all. Lindsey, who is a Vista volunteer, came here recently from Ohio and her first job is coordinating Sales for Survivors.

Vicky is actually one of the Project's founding mothers. "I was diagnosed with breast cancer (for the second time) in 1997, just as the Amazon Warrior Extraordinaire Support Group was beginning to evolve into our own HCBHP. Although I was living in rural Del Norte County at the time, I spent much of the following year in Arcata undergoing adjuvant treatment. I was embraced by this remarkable community of women who provided emotional and practical support," she said.

"I'd been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1982, 15 years earlier. I had a mastectomy and was sent on my way. The biggest obstacles then were wresting some control over the process in order to have time to consider treatment options, and finding up-to-date resources," she said. Her second breast cancer experience was different. "I felt so fortunate to have access to the library that had been donated to HCBHP and to online resources."

After growing up in Willits, Vicky came to Arcata the first time in 1967 to attend Humboldt State. Later she moved to Sonoma County where she and her husband and another couple lived on a farm and grew all their own food, becoming essentially self-sufficient. She became interested in environmental restoration and became a partner in an environmental consulting company.

Now Vicky and her family live in Arcata again. She feels "the original vision of the Breast Health Project still animates the Project. It began as a local grassroots effort, a group of volunteers offering their collective wisdom and experience to benefit friends and neighbors. Now, of course, it's much more organized and professional and better for it. Not only is it able to serve a much larger population, it has earned creditability and respect in the medical community."

Lindsey is a recent graduate from Ohio State University; she hopes to go to medical school in the future. Lindsey says her new job is a "perfect match." "I love it. It is totally unique and fun."

Couples Journey, *continued from pg. 1*

perfect match for her. "It has given me compassion and caring and all the information I needed to make the best decisions. This place is incredible. I'm not sure I would have made it through the process without Sharon Nelson."

Claire also credits Scott for providing crucial support since her diagnosis. "Scott and I have been on this journey together. He has come with me to all appointments. He's totally part of the process." He's always asking, "Have you called the Breast Health Project yet?"

Since her diagnosis she has vacillated between her emotions and her intellectual desire to know the facts and figures related to her disease. She says the most difficult aspects of her experience have been making treatment decisions, particularly related to chemotherapy, and the waiting – for test results, for appointments, for treatment to start.

Whether she would need to do chemotherapy was a major concern for her. She gave a deep sigh of relief when she found out it would not be necessary. She has had breast surgery and will do radiation therapy and an aromatase inhibitor.

"The Breast Health Project has provided me with all the assistance I needed at every juncture. I felt I understood the disease and was able to be proactive and participate in medical appointments," Claire said. "The thing that I appreciate the most is that the Project will be there for me throughout my breast cancer journey."

5th Annual Free Mammogram Drawing

Drawings for free mammograms from Garberville to Crescent City will once again be coordinated by HCBHP and the American Cancer Society. Last year 43 mammograms were donated by Humboldt and Del Norte hospitals and radiologists.

All women at least 40 years of age are eligible. To enroll call ACS at 442-1436, ext.3. Spanish speakers may call HCBHP at 825-8345. Entries will be accepted from October 1st until noon October 29th. Information about financial assistance for screening is also available. – *Tell a friend!*

Sales for Survivors

Support HCBHP by shopping and dining at local businesses which donate 10 percent of their sales for a day in September or October in recognition of Gynecologic and Breast Cancer Awareness Months. Save the calendar insert in this newsletter. Let's thank the businesses who participate.

Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

Mon-Fri 9:00 am-2:00 pm
After hours by appointment
987 8th Street
(corner 8th & J)
Arcata, CA 95521
(707) 825-8345
Fax: (707) 825-8384
Email: info@hcbhp.org
Web: www.hcbhp.org

HCBHP does not advocate or endorse any specific course of treatment, whether medical, alternative or complementary. We offer support, information and hope to help women become their own medical advocates and find their own path to healing.

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Newsletters archived at www.hcbhp.org.
This is our last newsletter mailing. Do we have your e-mail?

Calendar

September is National Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month

Listen to Katie Whiteside interviews with HCBHP on KHSU Home Page.

Sept 2 & 16, Oct 7 & 21 • 1:00 p.m.

September 3 • 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Face to Face at HCBHP hosted by Martin Majer, MD, Medical Oncologist, Eureka Internal Medicine.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Enter the Free Mammogram Drawings
Please see page 3.

October 10 • 7:00 p.m.

Sandra Steingraber, Ph.D.

Ecologist, author and cancer survivor will speak about health and the environment. Benefit for Six Rivers Planned Parenthood, HCBHP, and HUUF Green Sanctuary. HSU Kate Buchanan Room. Tickets \$20, students free - reservations required. Call 825-8345

October 24, 7:00 p.m., **HCBHP Fall Concert "You'll Never Walk Alone"**

Please see the information at right.

November 5 • 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Face to Face at HCBHP

Hosted by Ellen Mahoney, MD
Breast Medicine Specialist.

January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month



Support Groups

- **Breast Cancer Support Group**
1st & 3rd Thursdays • 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
- **Gynecologic Cancer Support Group**
2nd & 4th Tuesdays • 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.
- **Advanced Disease Support Group**
Living with Stage 4 disease
1st & 3rd Mondays • 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- **Amazon Writers**
Writing about your cancer journey
Call for schedule
Meeting times may change. Call 825-8345

We're planning our FALL BENEFIT CONCERT

You'll Never Walk Alone

A Celebration of Community
Saturday, October 24 • 7:00 PM
Arkley Center for the Performing Arts
412 G Street, Eureka, CA

Featured Artists ...

Brad Curtis
Elisabeth Harrington
Rose Armin-Hoiland
Luther Cobb, MD
Annette Gurnee Hull
Aber Miller
Shao Way Wu

Master of Ceremonies ...

Richard Duning

Reception ...

Gourmet Foods & Wines
donated by
Local Businesses and Volunteers

Tickets \$25 • Open Seating

Available at

Arkley Center for the Performing Arts

707-442-1956

Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

707-825-8345

Dr. Cobb & Dr. Mahoney's Office

707-476-0691

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