



Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

Supporting individuals facing breast or gynecologic cancer concerns

Fall 2011

Volume 12 Issue 2

2011: Pivotal Year in Cervical Cancer Screening

*By Julie Ohnemus, MD, HCBHP Founder & Medical Consultant,
Associate Chief Medical Officer, Open Door Community Health Centers*

Sixty years ago women in the US began their annual ritual of getting Pap smears. This annual "rite" is changing to become even more effective at identifying abnormalities earlier, and more efficient with distinguishing women at higher risk.

Cervical cancer used to be the leading cause of cancer death in women. As the first-ever systematic effort to detect early cancer, the Pap test has been very successful. It has reduced death caused by cervical cancer by up to 99% and its incidence by up to 80%.

Persistent high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) infections, which are sexually-transmitted, cause almost all cases of cervical cancer. They also cause cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, and cancer of the throat. At least 50% of sexually active men & women have an HPV infection at some point in their lives, and by age 50, at least 80% of women have been infected. This is why the new HPV vaccines recommended for females and males ages 19-26 will most likely have a major impact on reducing cervical pre-cancers and cancer for future generations.

Knowledge about HPV has improved the Pap screen. Currently, if your Pap smear is abnormal then a test is done to look for the high risk HPV virus. If positive, then a colposcopy procedure is done that often involves biopsies. If negative you only need a repeat pap in one year.

Surprisingly, the Pap test correctly detects abnormal cervical cells only 50% of the time. Cervical cancer is slow growing – typically taking 10-15 years to become invasive. If Paps are done regularly, then most often cervical cancer is caught at an early, treatable stage.

Studies now show that the HPV test used as the initial primary screen can detect cervical abnormalities even earlier than Paps. It can stratify women to a lower risk group (no HPV or only low risk HPV), thus allowing a lengthened time between cervical screenings ranging between 3-10 years, depending on the country where you live.

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HCBHP's Life-Giving Gynecologic Cancer Support Group

By Linda Serrano and Rebecca Zettler, RN



Some members of the GYN support group with group facilitator, Rebecca Zettler, RN.

A handful of women with gynecologic cancer got together at the Breast Health Project in the fall of 2003 to start a support group they could call their own. Since then, the group has met twice a month, sustaining an open circle of caring support and hearing the stories of over 110 women. The article that follows not only captures the voices of these women but reflects the guiding principles of the Project. Thank you Linda for recording our thoughts and transforming them into the written word, and to each member of the Gyn Gals, past and present, for sharing your experience. -RZ

Women of varying ages, backgrounds and family arrangements gather every second and fourth Tuesday at the Breast Health Project office for the GYN support group. We come to share our experiences with a life-threatening illness, gynecologic cancer, and the sadness, fear, hope, joy and gratitude that this diagnosis brings.

Circling on comfortable couches and chairs, we listen to each other's stories. Our medical diagnoses, progress, and doctors are not the same. Each of us approaches the information, makes decisions, and chooses treatments differently. Even so, and more importantly, together we create a safe place where our individual choices, paths, and unique stories unfold in an environment of support and confidentiality.

Here we gather information on the latest medical advances. We talk about hard issues, like what's going on with us physically and emotionally. We share what's on our minds

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Pivotal Year in Cervical Cancer Screening

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So why not just use the HPV screen? It turns out most women, especially in the younger crowd, < 30 years old, actually are able to get rid of their HPV infection before it causes any abnormality. So this as the sole test would end up over-treating women. Studies are now looking at what age women should get the initial HPV screen and what to do if it comes back positive. For now if you are over 30 you may be offered co-testing, both Pap and HPV testing. Beware: not all insurances cover upfront HPV testing, though California law requires private insurers to pay. The US Preventative Task Force in May recommended continued research into the most effective and efficient way to utilize HPV testing, leading to the likelihood the HPV screen will replace the Pap test in the next several years.

The current recommendations for cervical cancer screening can be found in the column opposite this article, and on the HCBHP website.

The other pivotal action for women's health care is the Affordable Care Act enacted in May. Beginning August 1, 2012, health insurance plans will be required to cover, without co-pays or deductibles, eight preventative or contraceptive services for women. These are listed at the bottom of the column opposite this article, and on the HCBHP website.

This is all a step forward for women's gynecologic health.



Mammograms, Pap Tests, Women's Health Exams



Women without insurance or with high patient costs, and who meet income guidelines, may qualify for Free Women's Health Care in the following programs:

- **CDP: Every Woman Counts.** All local hospitals and many doctor's offices and clinics participate.
- **Family PACT:** All local hospitals and many doctor's offices and clinics participate.
- **Mad River Hospital's Free Mammography Grant** from the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Call HCBHP or check our website for more information.

2011 Cervical Cancer Screening Recommendations 2011:

- Start pap screening at age 21** (regardless of age of first intercourse). Even if you have had the HPV vaccine you still need screening.
- Age 21-29: screen every 2 years.** Women under age 30 should NOT be screened with HPV tests, because most women will clear the HPV infection.
- Age 30 + : screen every 3 years if...**
 - 3 prior consecutive normal Pap tests
 - No history of moderate to severe cervical pre-cancers or cancer
 - Or negative High Risk HPV test and normal pap
- Annual screening if...**
 - Immunocompromised (i.e. HIV, patients with organ transplants or on immuno-suppressant drugs). It has been suggested, but not studied for those whose "compromising treatment or disorder" (e.g. chemotherapy or immunosuppressant drugs) ended, that they should return to the typical screening recommendations after 3 subsequent consecutive normal pap smears.
 - History of moderate to severe pre-cancers or cancer - women previously treated for these remain at risk for persistent or recurrent disease for at least 20 years after treatment. This group should therefore continue to be screened annually for at least 20 years.
 - Exposure to DES in utero
- Stop screening at 65 or 70 years if ...**
 - 3 prior consecutive normal Pap tests
 - No history of abnormal pap in last 10 years
 - Possible exception to stopping includes older women with favorable life expectancies who are sexually active with new male partners.
 - Stop screening, if hysterectomy** (must include removal of the cervix) for reasons other than cervical cancer or pre-cancer, and you were not exposed to DES in utero



Affordable Care Act Policy Changes

Effective August 1, 2012 all health plans are to cover these services without co-pays or deductibles:

- Contraceptive methods and counseling to prevent unintended pregnancies (exception: religious institutions providing insurance coverage to their employees)
- Yearly well-woman preventive care visits to obtain recommended preventive services
- HPV testing as part of cervical cancer screening for women over 30
- Screening for gestational diabetes
- Counseling for sexually-transmitted infections for sexually active women
- Counseling and screening for HIV for sexually active women
- Lactation counseling and equipment to promote breast-feeding

Stepping Into A Process



By Lisa Slack, shown here at Mad River Beach

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, the medical team's roles seemed well-defined and based on a specific plan of treatment. The Breast Health Project's role, on the other hand, has been flexible and created by my unique and often changing needs.

My initial contact happened when I received a call-back notice for a diagnostic mammogram. As I was grappling with my fears, it occurred to me that the group I bought raffle tickets from was called the Humboldt Community Breast Health Project! I walked in off the street, stumbled through my story, and was taken into the fold. Half an hour later, I walked out with Susan Love's book on breast cancer and the knowledge that whatever happened I would have a place to go for loving support and education.

This month marks the two year anniversary of my surgery. Without the Project's staff I cannot imagine how I would have managed what has been a challenging process. I recently decided I feel ready to be taken off the Project's check-in call list. I was assured by my "Warmliner" that they will always be there for me.

Want to Help Save a Life?

Please work with us to spread the following message to every woman you know. You just might save a life.

By Mary Meengs, MD, Director of Client Services

A woman's chance of getting breast cancer sometime in her life is 1 in 8; cancers of the reproductive organs (most commonly endometrial/uterine and ovarian) occur significantly less often. What the gynecologic cancers do share with breast and other cancers is the fact that the earlier they are found, the better the chance for a good outcome. Though there is not a proven and practical screening tool, like a mammogram, and you can't palpate your own uterus and ovaries for abnormalities, there are certainly symptoms which are known to be associated with these cancers. Time and again at the Project we hear about a woman who was diagnosed later than she could or should have been.

Any vaginal bleeding or spotting after menopause warrants a conversation with your doctor about checking for endometrial cancer. This might involve an endometrial biopsy, done in the office, or a D&C done in outpatient surgery. Before or during the menopause transition, bleeding that is unusually heavy or irregular should also be investigated. Known risk factors for endometrial cancer include obesity, being on Tamoxifen, and never having been pregnant.

Ovarian cancer is often diagnosed after it has been present for quite a while and had a chance to grow and spread. This is due in part to the fact that our ovaries are deep inside us, and that there is no easy test for early detection. However, there are definitely symptoms which are known to correlate with ovarian cancer.

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From the Executive Director

Passion and Compassion – These two words describe the work of HCBHP's volunteers and staff. They impact the lives of many women, men and families thanks to their dedication and shared experiences. People find their way to the Breast Health Project feeling overwhelmed when facing a cancer diagnosis, and quickly find that the welcoming and knowledgeable support at HCBHP helps them feel a little more in control.

HCBHP's services are free. Our organization is funded by donations and participation at fundraisers from our grateful clients and supporters like you. The services we provide are not reimbursable by insurance and only about 10% of our budget is grant-funded. We thank you if you are currently a donor and welcome your support if you're not.

Have you noticed an increase in solicitation calls? *You will not receive cold calls from HCBHP asking for donations! And, we do not sell our mailing list!* If you get calls from organizations asking for money for breast cancer support services please be cautious. We encourage you to give locally, not to some unknown person over the phone. I welcome your calls if you are concerned about telephone solicitation calls.

Please tell your friends, co-workers and family about the Breast Health Project. If they are potentially facing breast or gynecologic cancer we welcome their call or visit during our drop-in hours. Some of the best support we offer is during that nerve-racking time while people are awaiting test results. Please encourage those you care about not to wait. Call us today!



Rose Gale-Zoellick, Executive Director rosegz@hcbhp.org

✂ **Calendar of Upcoming Events** ✂

September 17 HCBHP's 11th Annual Fall Concert- Heartbeats & Helping Hands

Arkley Center for Performing Arts 7:00-9:00 pm.

Musicians include: The Humboldt Chorale, Dr. Luther Cobb, Brian Post and Shao Way Wu, and Tyler Hunt and Friends
Tickets are \$30, open seating, and may be purchased from: the HCBHP office in Arcata (825-8345), Arkley Center in Eureka (442-1956, www.arkleycenter.com), or the office of Drs. Cobb and Mahoney in Eureka

October 1 Free Mammogram Drawing Kick-off

Drawing November 1, 2011

For uninsured and underinsured women, ages 40 and over
Enter to win one of over 30 free mammograms that have been donated by hospitals and radiologists from Arcata to Garberville.

Call the American Cancer Society 442-1436 x-3. Si se habla Espanol, llame el HCBHP at 825-8345. Information about financial assistance for breast cancer screening is also available.

TELL A FRIEND!

OCTOBER Sales for Survivors

See the hot pink insert in this newsletter for the Calendar of over 50 Businesses supporting HCBHP

October 5 Hops, Hope & Healing

Pints for Non-Profits at Mad River Brewery, Blue Lake, CA 2:00-9:00 pm

Music by *The Country Pretenders*, featuring *Joyce Hough* and *Fred Neighbor* from 6:30-8:30 pm.

Food will be for sale as well.
A portion of proceeds to benefit HCBHP.

October 29 Pink Wheelbarrow Raffle Drawing

Miller Farms, McKinleyville

Purchase of raffle tickets gives you a chance to win a pink wheelbarrow filled with garden-related items. You can also volunteer to sell raffle tickets at Miller Farms on Saturdays. To sign up, call Rose or Mary at 825-8345.

November 12 "Burlesque for Breasts"

by Blue Angel Burlesque
Benefit Performance for HCBHP at Eureka Theatre

Enjoy a silly, sexy vaudeville performance with social commentary!
Silent Auction, Dress for Success Photos, Music and Dancing
Red Fox Tavern's "After Party" to follow.
Watch HCBHP's website for more information.

We Are Forever Grateful to Our Contributors!

Foundations and Event Partners during the past eight months:

- American Cancer Society, Local Hospitals & Radiologists for Free Mammogram Drawing
- Baroni Designs
- Coastal Business Systems
- Eureka High School's Volleyball Team
- Fall Concert Sponsors
- HSU Women's Volleyball Team
- Humboldt Redwood Company
- Humboldt Roller Derby
- Levin Foundation
- Mad River Community Hospital
- McLean Foundation
- Miller Farms
- Northcoast Co-op
- Raffle Business Sponsors
- Rotary Club of Arcata
- Safeway Foundation
- Six Rivers Running Club – Atalanta's Victory Walk & Run
- Soroptimist International of Humboldt Bay



To receive a copy of our 2010 Annual Report with a complete listing of contributors, please call us at 825-8345, or view the program and fiscal reports at www.hcbhp.org.

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Volunteer Coordinator Mary Flowers
VISTA Outreach Coordinator Alice Mao
GYN Cancer Support Group Facilitator Rebecca Zettler, RN

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Save A Life

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They are:

1. Bloating
2. Pelvic or abdominal pain
3. Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, and
4. Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency).

Though each of these symptoms could be caused by a number of conditions other than cancer, if you have them almost daily for more than a few weeks, see your doctor. If symptoms persist, insist on evaluation, until either an explanation or diagnosis is found, or the symptoms resolve. Investigation should include imaging, such as ultrasound or CT scan.

If results of imaging or endometrial biopsy show a gynecologic cancer or are suspicious for it, anyone living on the North Coast should be referred out of the area to a gynecologic oncologist for surgery and expert care.

We encourage you to be your own best medical advocate. Persistence in getting a definite diagnosis and pursuing specialized, expert care are critical; it is literally a matter of life and death. Please share this information. You could save a life.



Gynecologic Cancer Support Group

(continued from p.1)

and in our spirits. We talk about our victories and losses, recovery and death, the things that our friends and families are not comfortable with or can't always understand.

We freely express the depth of our feelings, knowing that compassion, comfort, and reassurance come from women who have, at one time or another, felt the same way. Our time together is always in the present, seamless, evolving, and healing. And when we leave, we part feeling lighter and more accepting of our illness and ourselves. -LS



Fortuna Women's Softball Tournament



Cassie Coppini, Mandie Buckland and Friends held a 12-team softball tournament in Fortuna on July 9th because they wanted to help local women with breast cancer. The "Batting for Boobies" Tournament raised nearly \$4,000, which they donated to the Breast Health Project! Big thanks to Cassie and her friends who organized the event and to all the teams who participated!

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month
remember your yearly mammogram

Tell your friends!

In collaboration with
American Cancer Society and
Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

Free Mammogram Drawing!

If you are a woman at least 40 years of age and uninsured or underinsured, enter for a chance to win one of over 30 FREE mammograms.

Call ACS at (707) 442-1436, ext 3
Drawing at ACS office 11/1/2011

Mammograms donated by
Jerold Phelps Community Hospital, Mad River Community Hospital,
Redwood Memorial Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital
and associated radiology groups.

Times-Standard
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HUMBOLDT COMMUNITY BREAST HEALTH PROJECT
ELEVENTH ANNUAL BENEFIT CONCERT

SEPTEMBER 17, 2011 • 7:00 PM



Featured Artists

Luther Cobb, MD • Brian Post and Shao Way Wu
Tyler Hunt and Friends • The Heartbeat Chorale
Elisabeth Harrington

Reception • Gourmet Finger Foods & Wine

THE ARKLEY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, EUREKA

OPEN SEATING • TICKETS \$30

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE ARKLEY CENTER 442-1956

HCBHP OFFICE, ARCATA 825-8345

DR. COBB & DR. MAHONEY'S OFFICE, EUREKA 476-0691

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(707) 825-8384 FAX

Office Hours
Mon-Fri 9 am-2 pm
After hours by appointment

E-mail: info@hcbhp.org
Website: www.hcbhp.org

Email us at volunteer@hcbhp.org
to subscribe to our monthly
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**Sales for Survivors &
Free Mammogram Drawing
Begin October 1st
Look Inside for More Information**

OR CURRENT RESIDENT



Support Groups

Meeting times may change. Call 825-8345 to confirm, or to add your name to our support group reminder call list.

Arcata Breast Cancer Support Group

Arcata, HCBHP Office
2nd & 4th Thursdays of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Gynecologic Cancer Support Group

Arcata, HCBHP Office
2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the Month, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Amazon Writers, a Peer-Led Group

Arcata, HCBHP Office
2nd & 4th Wednesdays of the Month, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Fortuna Breast Cancer Support Group

Visiting Angels Office, 1719 Main Street
1st Wednesday of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Young Women's Breast Cancer Support Group

Arcata, HCBHP Office
3rd Wednesday of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Advanced Group

For those living with Stage 4 Disease
Arcata, HCBHP Office
Every Monday, 11:00 am-12:30 pm

How You Can Support our Services

- Give a gift from Baroni Jewelry:
www.baronidesigns.com
- Search the internet and shop online with Good Search/Good Shop:
www.GoodSearch.com
www.GoodShop.com
- Make a monthly pledge via credit card or Pay Pal from our website, or by using HCBHP's pledge envelopes.
- Leave a legacy gift for the HCBHP at Humboldt Area Foundation.
- Host an HCBHP benefit fundraiser to celebrate your birthday or in honor of healthy survivorship - a yard sale, a gourmet meal, a dance party, a softball tournament.
- Contribute your volunteer skills.