

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

By Murphy Vestute, October 2002

In 2002, over 200,000 women and 1,600 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer! It is estimated that of these newly diagnosed cases, approximately 39,600 women and 400 men will die of this disease, according to statistics compiled by the American Cancer Society. Cancer of the breast, however, does not cause death by itself. Often, death is due to metastases to the liver, lungs, neck and the brain. Did you know that early breast cancer does NOT cause pain?

Symptoms of **breast cancer in women** include: a lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area; a change in the size or shape of the breast; a discharge from the nipple; or a change in the color or feel of the skin of the breast, areola, or nipple. Symptoms of **male breast cancer** include: abnormal lumps or swelling in either the breast, nipple or chest muscle, skin puckering or dimpling, nipple retraction (a nipple that turns inward), nipple discharge, and/or a redness or scaling of the nipple or breast skin.

Although simply being female puts all women at risk for breast cancer, breast cancer risks are individual. The following **risk factors for breast cancer in women** include: a family history of breast cancer; age, in general (the older you are, the greater your risk); never having borne a child; having your first child after age 30; first menstrual period at an early age; a history of benign breast disease that required biopsies. Other breast conditions; such as lobular carcinoma in situ, which is abnormal cells in the lobules of the breast, or atypical hyperplasia, which is a benign condition in which breast tissue has certain abnormal features, are also risk factors related to breast cancer in women.

Approximately 1% of all breast cancer cases occur in men. The following **risk factors for breast cancer in men** include: advancing age, family history, prior radiation treatment to the chest, liver disease, having been treated with estrogen, BRCA2 gene mutations, and Klinefelter's syndrome, which affects about 1 in 850 men.

Every woman can actively take part in the early detection of breast cancer. The breast self-exam is the first line of defense for early detection of breast cancer. Women ages 20 - 39 should have a monthly breast self-exam, and a clinical breast exam every 3 years. Women ages 40 and over should have an annual mammogram, which is an x-ray of the breast, a monthly breast self-exam, and an annual clinical breast exam, which is performed by a doctor or a nurse. Men can also take an active part in the detection of breast cancer by prompting their doctors to perform a breast exam.

The following is a short list of breast cancer resources:

- **American Cancer Society** will send you free information on breast (or any other type of) cancer. Ask for their pamphlet on How to Examine Your Breasts, along with other breast cancer information.
- **FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered** is for women who are at high risk of getting breast cancer due to family history and genetic status, and for members of families in which a BRCA mutation may be present.
- **Mothers Supporting Daughters with Breast Cancer** provides ways for mothers to support daughters during breast cancer recovery.

- **National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organization** provides up-to-date information on breast cancer and promotes affordable detection and treatment.
- **SHARE: Self-help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer** supports those living with breast or ovarian cancer and their families; offers peer-led support groups, a hotline, as well as wellness, educational and advocacy programs in English and Spanish.
- **Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation** offers a breast care helpline, screening methods and treatment options, and provides information for resources and support services.
- **Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization** provides hotline counseling, educational programs, and self-help meetings. They also provide a Y-Me Men's Support Line.
- **Breast Cancer in Men** offers information, support resources and medical references for anyone dealing with male breast cancer.
- **Imaginis** provides a web resource for news and information on breast cancer prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment – for both men and women.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death among women (2002). Remember: ALL women are at risk for breast cancer; men are at risk, too. Call a friend, go for a check-up together, and pass this information on to others!