



Bridging the Gap

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JON CANCELINO

CANCER SURVIVOR, HELEN HACKETT, AND CAROL ROSENBERG, M.D.

NorthShore University HealthSystem's Living in the Future "LIFE" Community Survivorship Program helps cancer survivors make the transition from treatment back to their communities, families, and a healthier life. With the support of the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center and its volunteers, the LIFE program provides one-on-one counseling and seminars to promote thrivership for these patients.
by Evangeline Politis

Helen Hackett of Deerfield was diagnosed with cancer in March of 2006. Prior to even having her surgery, she was approached by Carol Rosenberg, M.D., at the health club in Bannockburn about a program that would help Helen with her recovery. Dr. Rosenberg had noted how strong a leader Helen was in the community and as an instructor at the gym. She knew Helen would be an outstanding candidate for a program Dr. Rosenberg was developing to help cancer survivors make the transition from treatment in her role as Director of Preventive Health Initiatives for NorthShore University HealthSystem.

"At that point I had no idea what was going to occur. Dr. Rosenberg threw me a lifeline with something positive—I will come out of all of this," explains Helen about her first reaction. "This was before I had my surgery and I wasn't sure if I was going to need chemotherapy. That's a very scary time. Here she was talking about survivorship, [the time] when I would be done with all this. So I agreed." At that point, Dr. Rosenberg was developing the LIFE (Living in the Future) Community Survivorship Program. She needed someone to be a patient representative for the program from the beginning of his or her treatment and chose Helen to act as an example.

Helen's treatment ended in September, and she took the first step in the LIFE program—the risk adapted visit—the following month. During that visit, she had a one-on-one meeting with Carole Martz, an experienced oncology clinical nurse specialist. Nurse Martz provides recommendations about appropriate lifestyle choices for former cancer patients. The information supplied is tailored to the nature of the participant's cancer, including a complete medical summary, all consolidated in a personalized printed handout to act as a convenient reference. It includes guidelines such as dietary information and exercise recommendations.

This visit also gives the patients the emotional support they crave. "During treatment for cancer, you are under the constant care of doctors—regular visits, regular treatments, regular follow-up...There's a sense of security that someone is watching over you when you're going through this. When treatment ends, you lose that weekly contact you're accustomed to," describes Helen. "Rather than just sending former cancer patients out into the world, the LIFE program gives people a bridge for the transition from being a cancer patient to being a cancer survivor."

After the initial meeting, the survivors go through



Photo courtesy of Jonathan Hillenbrand

EILEEN RUBENSTEIN GOLDSTEIN AND HER HUSBAND, DR. PAUL GOLDSTEIN, WHO—IN MEMORY OF HER SISTER (PICTURED IN BACKGROUND)—ESTABLISHED THE MYRA RUBENSTEIN WEIS HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER.

a series of educational seminars called Myra Rubenstein Weis Survivorship 101: Thrivership! The series is named after the important contributions made by the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center. Eileen Rubenstein Goldstein and her husband, Dr. Paul Goldstein, established the Center at Highland Park Hospital in memory of her sister Myra, who died of breast cancer. The Center promotes health education. Eileen and Paul took an interest in the seminars because of the LIFE program's comparable goal to educate cancer survivors. "The seminars are focused on not leaving out any patients after cancer treatment. Plus, they educate them how to lead a healthy life," explains Eileen.

The seminars reflect the core concerns for cancer survivors. The first program is called "Eat to Beat Malignancy, Walk Away from Cancer," which is taught with a scientific approach by three health professionals and utilizes numerous studies and research to establish a healthy diet and exercise routine for attendees. The next seminar focuses on self-esteem and sexual intimacy and is conducted by a social worker and a clinical psycholo-

gist. There is also "How LIFE Events Impact Insurance and Employability," led by an attorney, and the newest seminar, "Genetics for the Cancer Survivor." The seminars are small, typically about 30 people, and are open to the public free of charge. Since most seminars fill up quickly, Dr. Rosenberg encourages participants to register online at the LIFE program's Web site, www.northshore.org/life.

Not only do the seminars educate, they also bring a sense of community to the survivors. "When I went to that first lecture, I was struck by how many other people were in that room. During treatment, you can get a sense that [cancer] is only happening to you and a couple of people you know, but to see all these people at a LIFE program—all different age groups, all different ethnic backgrounds, all different life experiences—all facing the same thing—there's a sense of community created," describes Helen. "There's a sense of not being alone in the dark; in fact, you're not alone at all and there's a big crowd around you."

The LIFE Program is a part of the NorthShore University HealthSystem and is this year's beneficiary for the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center Luncheon, "Healthy Lifestyles." Judy Markey, one of Chicago's favorite "girlfriends," will serve as the keynote speaker at this year's event, which will take place on Wednesday, May 6 at Highland Park Country Club. Through the tireless efforts of the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center volunteers, programs such as the MRW 101: Thrivership! series are made possible.

For reservations to this year's luncheon, call 847-926-5003. For more information about the LIFE program, call 847-926-5818, or visit www.northshore.org/life. □