

Pink Sunday

INTRODUCTION

October is breast cancer awareness month. Tonight, STAR celebrates "Pink Sunday" in honor of this occasion.

Thank you for being here on this very special night. We come here together to share our stories, to share fellowship and to support each other. Whether we have cancer or know someone who has cancer, by showing up - by being present - we express our concern for each other.

HISTORY AND SOME FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

Notes from the National breast cancer *Foundation Inc.*

- 1 in 8 women experience breast cancer
- 1982- Susan G. Komen - evolution of the pink ribbon. Komen used the color pink to promote awareness and programs for breast cancer mindfulness. A pink ribbon symbolizes breast cancer awareness.
- Betty Ford founded the Betty Ford Center. After recovering, she founded and served as the first chair of the board of directors of the Betty Ford Center for substance abuse and addiction. Ford was noted for raising breast cancer awareness following her 1974 mastectomy.

1992 - Estee Lauder - pink ribbons. The Estée Lauder Companies' Breast Cancer Campaign unites and inspires people globally in The Campaign's mission to create a breast cancer-free world for all. Founded in 1992 by the late Evelyn H. Lauder with the launch of the iconic Pink Ribbon. Now, over 1.5 million ribbons exist throughout the world.

AWARENESS

Facts vs. Emotion

Our stories -

Each woman who experiences breast cancer has a different story. One woman tells how she fell on the floor when her doctor shared the news that she had cancer. Another screamed and cried. Another sat still in shock.

Breast cancer affects people of all ages. Once we become aware that cancer lives in us, our lives change forever, no matter what the outcome.

Our differences

When tragedy strikes, there are so many decisions that must be made. What type of treatment is available? Do we even want treatment? Do we talk to our family and friends? Do we keep silent? How do we examine our feelings about death and dying? This week, I saw a story on the news about a woman hugging her husband goodbye as he boarded a plane headed toward Gaza. Tears were streaming down her face as she watched him walk away from her. She was unsure if she would ever see him again. Cancer is like that. It changes us. It takes away control. It leaves us with a legacy of uncertainty. Some of us may remain stoic and keep our feelings to ourselves. Others rush to share the smallest of details. Some of us feel the need to research and find out everything that we can. Others reject information and wait for whatever inevitable outcome that may await us.

Tragedy events change our lives in ways that we can never predict. One man recently said to me, "I never thought I would be spending my retirement this way."

Our shared experiences

If we choose to share our experiences, we often find camaraderie among those that we meet. Healing happens to each person in different ways.

Physical

Our physical bodies have their own ways of handling tragedy. When I came to work for hospice, my first patient was a quadruple amputee. His wife told me that her husband wanted to live as long as possible, no matter what his body looked like. She learned to accept his decisions as limb after limb disappeared. His decisions not only affected his own body, they affected her as well.

Emotional

A range of emotions. It's not uncommon to have depression, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, loneliness, and body image issues, among others. In fact, about 1 in 4 people with any type of cancer may have major or clinical depression and benefit from its treatment. One day you're just going about your life and the next minute, you're scrambling to get tests and scans as you try to make sense of complex medical information and your fast-changing reality.

If we choose to share our stories, perhaps with someone that we are close to, or maybe in a support group, we must be willing to openly share how we feel. Can we open up to others? If not, can we help absorb their feelings and be there for them? In the case of breast cancer, can we look at the color pink without breaking down? If we lose someone in a car accident or by a mass shooting, can we ever go on without that person? Can we learn to move forward? One

son called me and said, "It has been two weeks since my mother died. When is the grief going to be over?" A recent St. Jude's commercial showed a mother saying that "healing happens even years after a child dies."

Fears can include worries about treatment costs, anxiety, and uncertainty about how it will impact your life or even your mortality, how the cancer may change your physical body, and how it may affect your loved one's lives.

CONCLUSION

Tonight, we have focused our thoughts and prayers on breast cancer. However, in the bigger scheme of things it is important that we think about not only breast cancer, but also other issues in our world. And as we do so, we become intensely aware of how we handle major events that affect our lives. Do we go deep inside of ourselves? Do we share our life experiences with others; perhaps our family members and/or close friends? Do we stop living and merely exist? Or do we move forward, even if it is one step at a time.

I am grateful that there are organizations that help us to move forward. Places we can go where we can feel support; where we can learn and where we can contribute not only to our own growth, but also to the greater good. Perhaps we can take heart in the words of Kathleen Ashton, a clinical health psychologist who said, "**Focus on one step of the plan at a time and remain flexible because sometimes the plan changes.**"

When life events happen, be flexible. Be open. Be pink and yellow and all the colors of the rainbow. Be kind to others and yourself. Practice self-care and most of all, love yourself.

Amen and Namaste.