

BULLETIN

## On the front lines in the fight against breast cancer

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**Alex Finley** figures she has been x-rayed [about five million times.] Finley became familiar with x-rays and radiography early in life, when she was diagnosed with scoliosis.

Alex Finley Radiographer Mount St. Joseph's Hospital
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But she didn't let it slow her down. [I was in my early 20s when I had my second operation [for spinal fusion],] she said. [At the time, I was out of high school, and I wasn't doing anything; I was surfing and snowboarding and I hadn't gone to university like my parents wanted me to.] It doesn't seem to occur to Finley that far from not [doing anything,] surfing and boarding strike most people as surprising activities for a young woman recovering from spinal surgery.

Finley is young, confident, energetic. She has a ringing laugh, and a beguiling open manner. It's clear she loves her job as a radiographer.

[I really wanted to work in the health care field,] she said. [I looked at all the different occupations, and I chose radiography because it was the one that most suited me.

[I love working with women; I have three sisters, and I love working with women from all walks of life: old, young, ethnic. I learn a lot from many different cultures working at Mount St. Joseph's, because it's such a diverse hospital,] she said.

Finley said most first-time patients are nervous. [Part of the radiographer's job is to be able to talk to them, relax them, and make them feel comfortable,] she said [and Finley has a natural gift.

[We start by asking the patient a few questions. Part of it is routine, and part of it is just demeanour [the way you are with them [tone of voice, the way the room is set up. We have all kinds of different techniques that we use, and most of the time the patients don't even notice that we're trying to relax them.

[I'm a [talky] person, but as a radiographer with a lady who's coming in for the first time, you have to explain throughout what to expect, and when they know, they can co-operate with you. They can relax when it's happening.]

A relaxed patient is crucial for a good image, Finley said. [One of the reasons we need the patient to relax is to

get their pectoral muscles completely relaxed," she said.

"Those muscles are right up against the breast tissue, and if the patient isn't relaxed, it doesn't create an optimal image. Fortunately, this isn't a problem with most patients."

Finley said there were a number of reasons why she was drawn to radiography, out of a field of hundreds of health professions. "I liked how it's such an awesome diagnostic tool," she said.

"With x-ray and mammography, you see the results right there in front of you. It's a visual thing; you can literally see them. And I enjoy the patient contact. You get to see various patients throughout the day, and each little five-minute section of the day is different. You get to meet someone and interact with a different person every few minutes. I really like that aspect of it."

Finley graduated from BCIT in May of 2002, and has been working at Mount St. Joseph's Hospital ever since. "I love working at this hospital," she said. "At Mount St. Joe's, all our radiographers rotate through the different departments. For example, we'll do one week of screening mammo, and we go through the other departments like x-ray and CT scan, as well as diagnostic mammography — where we work with women who aren't coming in for screening, but usually for a follow-up for breast cancer.

"This is an unusual arrangement, but our hospital is small enough that it works, and we're able to maintain a high consistency," she said.

"It's a big bonus. It cuts down on the repetitiveness, both mentally and physically, so it makes a big difference ergonomically as well. We get to go through different areas, and there's always something new. It's never boring."

Finley hopes medical imaging staff at other smaller hospitals might eventually consider the rotation system. "I hope other hospitals take note, if only to address the ergonomics of our work," she said. "Radiographers have a very high repetitive injury rate, and rotating hugely cuts down the effects of the repetitiveness. It's not as hard on our bodies.

"I love working here. This hospital really values their staff," she said. "It's really, really great." 

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