

BULLETIN

## **HSA support for Run helps fund important new research**

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by CHERYL GREENHALGH

Breast cancer has touched most of us in one way or another. Many of our patients, co-workers, friends and family have been affected by this disease, and HSA members are very involved in the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

That is why HSA has been a sponsor of the BC Breast Cancer Foundation's Run for the Cure since 1997. Through donations by our organization and pledges gathered by HSA members participating in the event, we have proudly directed \$45,000 to the foundation.

We are happy to report that this money was instrumental in supporting a new research project at the BC Cancer Agency. The HER-2/neu project will fund a laboratory service providing new cancer cell testing for those diagnosed with breast cancer – a test that is needed but not currently available in BC.

When a breast tumour is removed, it is assessed for evidence of malignancy and classified according to standard pathological criteria. In this way, the appropriate treatment may be recommended. More recently, researchers are looking at cancer cell analysis to better predict the outcome of treatment and response to therapy. HER-2/neu gene is a cell growth promoter which is overexpressed in approximately 30% of breast cancers. This appears to be associated with poor prognosis. There is interest in being able to test for HER-2 due to the development of an antibody (Herceptin) which is thought to act against the HER-2 protein by suppressing its growth-promoting activity. It is thought that Herceptin is only effective in women who overexpress HER-2 so it is essential to identify these women prior to exposing them to this potentially toxic therapy.

This study will evaluate and compare available HER-2 testing methods to establish the optimal method for HER-2 testing for patients with breast cancer. It is hoped that this will validate the application for provincial funding to provide this service to women in BC. This project, in conjunction with a separate study looking at the response rates of breast cancer patients to Herceptin and chemotherapy, may be a significant advance in breast cancer therapy.

I hope that HSA members will be very proud of their participation in this promising new technology. Having an appreciation for what we are funding is motivation to "keep up the good work." This year, the Run for the Cure will be held on October 3 in Nanaimo, Kelowna, Kamloops, Victoria and Vancouver. I would encourage you to set aside that morning to have a good time for a good cause. Run, walk or wheel one or five kilometres and know that you are supporting something important for all of us who are affected by breast cancer in BC.

*Cheryl Greenhalgh represents Region 3 on HSA's Board of Directors. Keep an eye on your HSA bulletin board for further information.*

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