

BULLETIN

HSA members there every step of the way towards recovery

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by CAROLE PEARSON



one in nine Canadian women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. Joan Magee, a lab technologist at Cariboo Memorial Hospital in Williams Lake, never thought she would be one of them.

Magee, HSAs Regional Director for Region 8, was at an HSA board meeting last year when a report was presented on the annual Run for the Cure. -Afterwards, as we were sitting around the table," she recalls, -we were saying, statistically, one of us will end up with breast cancer, not thinking it was really going to happen or that any of us were going to be the one."

But this past September, Magees annual screening mammogram revealed -something suspicious."

-Things were kind of a whirlwind after that," she says. -I had to have an ultrasound done and more diagnostic mammographies. I was referred to a surgeon and had a biopsy and was then scheduled for surgery. Everything went so quickly, you dont really have time to stop and think."

She was on holiday on Vancouver Island when she received the results of the diagnostic mammogram. She was admitted to St Josephs Hospital in Comox, which has a nuclear medicine department and facilities for performing sentinel node mapping.

She estimates the time from being diagnosed to having surgery was less than a month. -I cant say enough about how well Ive been treated," Magee says. -I have a whole new respect for the importance of the work that HSA members perform and all the disciplines they represent."

Magee said she sat down and thought about just how many HSA members she had encountered in her diagnosis and therapy process.

-Theres the lab technologists, mammographers, ECG technologists, sonographers, respiratory therapists, the nuclear medicine technologists and, of course, the biomedical engineers that keep all this equipment running in the hospitals," she says.

-The physiotherapists were there the day after my surgery, showing me what kind of exercises I should be doing to get the use of my arm back. Theres the pharmacists filling the prescriptions, dietitians, and the social workers who make sure everything is fine before you go home."

Magee started chemotherapy in Williams Lake in December. Sometime in the spring, she will receive radiation treatments in Kelowna, bringing her in contact with radiation therapists who are also HSA members.

Joan Magee Region 8 Director & breast cancer survivor Lab Technologist Cariboo Memorial Hospital

She admits, "I don't even know what other health care professionals I'll run into along the way."

"It really makes me see what a good fit it is for HSA to be involved in the Run for the Cure because we have so many disciplines that are involved once a person is diagnosed with breast cancer and the ongoing treatment."

"I'm getting to meet members that I wouldn't otherwise ... people who aren't stewards. I'm meeting members on the job and asking them about their work and how they're finding things. I ask them, "What can the union do better for you? It's good to get a little different view of things and I'm taking advantage of the chance to do some inside mobilizing."

Magee says her experience with breast cancer has made her realize how lucky we are in BC to have a free screening mammogram program available without a doctor's referral. -

"Any woman over 40 can just go in," she says and urges all women to take advantage of this valuable program. It enabled her own cancer to be detected early. "By postponing these things, if there is bad news, it's going to be much worse."

She was also told by her surgeon that some of the better chemotherapy drugs approved for use in BC aren't approved in other provinces. "He said I'm in one of the best provinces. And I'm in probably one of the best countries, also."

Magee is also thankful that Canada's Medicare system means she doesn't have to worry about losing her house or other financial hardships caused by high medical costs, unlike people in many other countries, and can focus her energies on becoming well again. "I've got lots of sick time accumulated and, after five months, I can go onto our long term disability plan."

She is appreciative of the important health care benefits negotiated into the collective agreement by HSA over the years. Some of the drugs she has been prescribed are very expensive and it was a relief, she says, to discover her extended medical coverage will pay for most of their cost.

"Everybody has just been wonderful," Magee says. "I've been overwhelmed with encouragement and support and emails from our members all over the province. From this experience, I certainly will be encouraging everybody to take part in Run for the Cure or to support someone who is." 

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