

Men Against Breast Cancer

By Esther Hughes

Behind every woman diagnosed with breast cancer is a man who is also affected by the disease. Whether he is a husband, father, son, brother or friend, he will feel the ramifications of the pain without experiencing the physical trauma. The men who are the caregivers for women who have breast cancer face many challenges as they are often the advocate and strength for one precious person in their life. In spite of the key part men play in the fight against breast cancer and the emotional and physical support they give to women, their role often goes unnoticed. Yet, they are a crucial part in the journey.

Men who are affected by a loved one with breast cancer, face emotional trauma, and though they may not suffer from physical pain, often the pain in their heart is so great that it becomes physical. Husbands often find themselves grieving over the uncertainty of the future. They are thrust into roles their wives have always done and now they must perform in the wake of her illness. They usually have to continue working because the bills keep rolling in. However, while trying to remain focused at work, the cloud of uncertainty taints their clear direction and their ability to do a good job for their

employer or customer.

My diagnosis was very hard on my husband. He was more upset than I because he felt helpless. He's a problem-solving kind of guy whose work focuses on providing solutions for his clients. He persistently sought solutions through comprehensive research of cancer in an effort to solve my problem. It was a problem that he, personally, could not solve. His faith in God, the support of our pastor, family members and friends helped him help me. It was not easy, however, for he was often carrying the burden of grocery shopping, cleaning, paying bills, and parenting our three children who were 6, 4 and 19 months old at the time of diagnosis, while continuing to manage his consulting company.

Unlike women, men tend not to seek the same support as a woman would do. They tend to 'think they can handle it.' Yet, many times the overwhelming stress of a life-threatening disease and its control over a relationship puts a strain on both parties. Thus, many times men will leave the women they are in a relationship with to free themselves of the weight brought on by the stress of dealing with a deadly illness.

The men who are affected by breast cancer need attention and support just like the woman who has breast cancer. They are a very important key in supporting the patient and aiding in her well-being. Ways that my husband found helpful to him were:

1) Prayer. Through prayer he found peace with the situation and acceptance of the outcome.

2) Exercise. Many nights when I was ill from treatments or fatigued from low blood counts, he would fix dinner, clean up, put the children to bed and then head off to the gym. He

found that exercise was a great stress reliever.

3) Reading. He read extensively during this time and knows more about cancer than I ever hope to.

4) Nutrition. He found that eating healthier gave him more strength and made him feel better.

5) Music. He loves music so he found that inspirational music helped calm his concerns.

For men who may not have support through a clergy or family member, there is a foundation that offers them support. Founded in 1999 by Marc Heyison and Steve Peck, Men Against Breast Cancer (MABC) is a non-profit organization that has mobilized men in the fight against breast cancer. The

main goal of MABC is to actively mobilize men to get the word out to fight the disease that threatens the women in their lives. Mr. Heyison states, "Men can and must get involved in helping the women we love battle this disease. Breast Cancer is a family issue. Our symbol, a pink and blue ribbon, signifies that the war against breast cancer is one that men and women must face together."

MABC provides support services to men through educating them on how to provide assistance to a loved one through treatment and provides services to help men cope with the impact of diagnosis and treatment. The group is an active participant in raising funds for research and has the participation of national leaders on its board.

For the man who is supporting the woman in his life through the long ordeal of breast cancer—thank you. The endurance and support offered by men, shows the commitment on their part by providing shoulders to lean on and loving the wives, daughters, mothers, sisters and girlfriends everywhere during life's darkest moments.

Esther J. Hughes
P.O. Box 491
Mullica Hill, NJ 08062
(856) 218-4653
info@onedayliving.com

*Originally Published in the
Gloucester County Times
January 2003*

You may learn more about Men Against Breast Cancer by visiting their web site at www.menagainstbreastcancer.org.