BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

October is a special time when we highlight breast cancer, a disease that has affected individuals and families in every community we serve.

In this, one of our busiest months, we remember those affected, celebrate those who have overcome, and continue to promote breast cancer awareness information that can help save lives.

In this edition of our newsletter, we highlight two of our own champions for health and breast cancer awareness.

These last several months have truly been a testament to our collective creativity and continued dedication to sharing important health messages, even during these unprecedented times. With your help, our office raised the standard even further last month with our “Hey, Fellas” virtual conversation series on prostate cancer awareness and men’s health. This marked a significant turning point as our first virtual educational sessions that were open to the general public.

During this month, remember to participate in both our “Sister Talk,” and a lunch and learn on breast cancer. Please continue to contribute your ideas and suggestions as we continue outreach and research activities while enhancing our virtual efforts. Also, contact our office if you need educational materials.

P.S. Don’t forget to ask every woman you know if she has had her mammogram. In fact, are you current with your breast cancer screening? Self-care is very important.

Thanks,
– Claudia

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

O’NEAL COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Claudia Hardy – Program Director
chardy@uab.edu

Tara Bowman – Program Manager
tbowman@uab.edu

Rochelle Wallace – Health Initiatives Manager
rlw365@uab.edu

Joseph D. Bryant - Newsletter Editor
josephbryant@uabmc.edu

Play this puzzle online at: https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/1285733/
A group of 17 cancer centers in the United States, including the O’Neal Cancer Center, have come together to better understand the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in delaying cancer detection, care and prevention. Cancer centers are working together with the National Cancer Institute on the impact of the pandemic on cancer care, prevention and survivorship. UAB is the coordinating site for the effort. Officials have warned that the pandemic might prevent some patients from undergoing needed screenings and delay access to procedures that could result in late-stage diagnosis and cancer death.

The cancer center, through the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement will conduct surveys among healthy volunteers and cancer survivors about their health and well-being during the pandemic. The survey will focus on work and employment, housing/home life, social activities, emotional well-being, physical health, and behavior related to COVID-19 prevention, as well as behaviors such as physical activity and tobacco use that have links to cancer. By complying with current pandemic restrictions, individuals will be contacted by phone, text and social media. Monica Baskin, Ph.D., Associate Director for Community Outreach and Engagement at the cancer center, urges patients to continue to undergo age-appropriate cancer screenings and reach out to their health care providers regarding options.

“These are discussions that patients should have directly with their health care provider to receive individual guidance,” Baskin said. “And on the flip side, the COVID-19 reality demands that health care providers and outreach teams learn ways to adapt strategies across the cancer care continuum to combat the deadly secondary effects of the pandemic.”

Stay up to date with all the activities and news at the O’Neal Cancer Center and the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement. Follow us:

ON THE WEB
go.uab.edu/oneal-coe-news

@ONealCancerCenteratUAB
@ONealCancerUAB
@onealcanceruab
NAN BROWN-CURTIS:
MINISTER OF AWARENESS
AND HOPE
Cancer, including breast cancer, has been a constant presence in the life of Nan Brown-Curtis. A sister and a niece both succumbed to breast cancer. Her mother and two aunts had breast cancer also. Her first husband died of lymphoma. Her current husband is a kidney cancer survivor and is currently fighting myeloma. Brown-Curtis herself is a survivor of colorectal cancer.

Brown-Curtis has built and crossed many bridges on her cancer journey. She is now using her experiences to help others make their own successful passage.

“It’s important for people to see others who have had a cancer diagnosis and are still alive,” Brown-Curtis said. A resident of Selma, Brown-Curtis is a longtime affiliate of the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement and a member of the O’Neal Cancer Center’s Community Advisory Board. She uses her personal history to serve as a living example of survival and perseverance.

Community service is also a family affair for Brown-Curtis as she, along with several of her sisters, share their family’s history of cancer. The women advocate in their Dallas County community, for early testing and awareness of family medical histories. “We didn’t keep what we knew inside of us. We shared it,” Brown-Curtis said. “We figured that it was our mission. We wanted people to know that cancer doesn’t care who you are, how old you are or how young you are.” She and her sisters do their advocacy work under the name of “Johnnie’s Girls,” in honor of their mother, Johnnie Mae Summers. Summers was a breast cancer survivor, who later died of ovarian cancer. Brown-Curtis is a strong advocate for families learning and discussing their shared medical histories. Her family shares the BRCA gene. Mutations in BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes increase the risk of several cancers including breast and ovarian cancer. “Families must find out their family history so they can start testing early,” Brown-Curtis said.

In January, Brown-Curtis, already a survivor of colorectal cancer, was presented with yet another challenge when she was diagnosed with lung cancer. She confides that even she was nervous about beginning her latest round of targeted chemotherapy treatment. “First of all we have to get rid of fear and doubt because they are the enemy,” she explained. “I said, ‘God, I don’t know what’s in this medicine. I do not have a clue. But you do.’ I walk in wellness and I don’t care what it is or how bad it is.”

She was a nurse for 26 years before transitioning into a 20-year career in healthcare professions education at the high school and college levels.

Brown-Curtis remains an advisor to many in her community. The COVID-19 pandemic has kept her physically away, but her phone continues to ring. And she’ll always answer. “As long as the Lord allows me to help someone, I’m going to help,” she said.

Family, faith and obedience to medical advice are essential, she said. As she encourages others, Brown-Curtis continues to find her own inspiration. “The positive has been the example that other people see coming from us,” Brown-Curtis said. “A lot of people know we have had adversity. They’ve seen endurance. They’ve seen that you can make it. They’ve seen how important family is.”

Brown-Curtis is also an ordained minister. “You have to be connected to someone greater than you and greater than anything that can happen in the Earth realm and around you,” she said. “That strong faith is important for the journey.”
FELLOWSHIP, FRIENDSHIP
AND SUPPORT IN GREENE
COUNTY

A visitor listening to Darlene
Robinson's community support
group in Greene County
might be hard pressed to
ever hear the word cancer
brought up in conversation.
While most of the regular
members are breast cancer
survivors, talk about their
shared disease is rare. There
are too many other subjects
and activities to keep every-
one busy.
“If you were to come one of
our meetings you would not
know that it was a cancer
survivors meeting,” said
Robinson, a coordinator for
Greene and Hale Counties.
“We don’t drown them with
breast cancer information.
We talk about it, but that’s
not the focus.”
Instead, the group supports
each other by offering
a short break from life’s
pressures and a forum when
members need an outlet.
“They’re the experts on can-
cer. I don’t need to tell them
anything,” Robinson said.
“This is a way for them to
release tension and do some-
thing different. It’s relieving a
lot of mental stress.”
There’s just one rule.
“Bring in something inspi-
rational. It sets the tone for
our meeting,” Robinson said
of the group of about 15
members.
Friends, relatives and
caretakers who have been
affected by cancer also
participate. Robinson said
one woman’s presence after
surviving both colon cancer
and breast cancer serves a
living symbol of hope.
“And she’s still with us,” Rob-
inson said. “We just have an
array of people.”
While the pandemic has
postponed physical, in-
person activities, Robinson is
anxious for the day when
she can once again convene
her support group. In the
meantime, she remains
connected to members with
regular phone calls.
“I just want to make a
difference in my community.
I want a place where all of
us fit in,” Robinson said. “Just
because you’re a cancer
survivor or just because you
might not have what
everybody else has, I want
you to fit in.”