

Western Pennsylvania Guide to Good Health

Health News You and Your Family Can Use

BREAST CANCER

'Navigator' Assists Breast Cancer Patients

By Lois Thomson

IF YOU RECEIVE NEWS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER, YOU MAY WISH YOU HAD SOMEONE WHO COULD ANSWER QUESTIONS, HELP YOU MANEUVER THROUGH UNCERTAINTIES, OR JUST LISTEN. MEET ALICE MURPHY.

Murphy is a certified registered technologist who holds the title of breast patient navigator for the Women's Center at The Washington Hospital. She explained, "Our goal is to help patients, to make sure they don't fall through the cracks. If there are any obstacles, we can help them, and if we don't know the answer, we find it."

As someone who worked in radiography for 20-plus years, Murphy begins by trying to see patients when they're having a biopsy. "That's exactly when I want to make that introduction, because if this person does have breast cancer, your first snapshot of somebody helps. I'm there as a presence."

If a patient needs further testing, an ultrasound, an MRI – Murphy is able to do the scheduling. She can also get the script for the exam so the patient doesn't have to worry about that. "Naturally we would like our patients to stay with our physicians at the hospital, because they are highly

Alice Murphy: Breast Cancer Survivor

One thing that assists Alice Murphy in her position as breast patient navigator is the fact that she is a breast cancer survivor. She was 31 when she found a lump in her breast; a surgeon removed it but had bad news. "It was like a tree fell on me," she said. "But I was very fortunate that I had doctors at my disposal, I could ask questions. By the time I went to the oncologist I already knew that I wanted to have chemo. I had four chemos over 12 weeks and I had six weeks of radiation. My family was wonderful, I couldn't have asked for more. And 14 years later, here I am."

Murphy said she doesn't always tell patients that she is a survivor, but sometimes "you know when to talk. And when they see, 'oh she's functioning, she's lived for this many years,' they start to ask questions and that really helps my job. I know they say things happen for a reason, and if there's any reason that I had (cancer), it sure helps me in this respect."



qualified. I work very closely with our radiologists and they're very informative with me, and that way I can be very informative with the patients as well. We're trying to make a smoother transition for our patients."

One of Murphy's duties is to call patients after 30 days. She said she was a little leery at first because she wasn't sure if people would want to talk. "Some of them don't, and you have to appreciate that. But I was pleasantly surprised that some women were very receptive. And they gave me good insight, they directed me to some questions I might have asked. I never give them any kind of advice, I'm here to listen, because sometimes they just need a listening ear."

Some of the obstacles Murphy mentioned could be if a patient doesn't know which surgical office to choose. "We cannot tell them who to go to, but we have

a list available and I can go over that list with them. If they can't call, I will call for them, and we make sure that we send all of their information to the surgeon they want to do go."

Other obstacles that could arise, although Murphy, who has been on the job just a few months, said she hasn't run into such problems, would be ones dealing with insurance or assistance with transportation.

One of just two breast patient navigators in Western Pennsylvania, Murphy said she loved her old job, "but this job came about, and as a breast cancer survivor of 14 years, it opened the door for me. And I want to express my gratitude to The Washington Hospital Lady's Auxillary Golf Outing for helping to fund the Breast Patient Navigator Program. The position very much intrigued me because, one, I could help the patients, and two, I thought I could be good at it."



For more information on the **Breast Navigator Program** at **The Washington Hospital**, call 724-250-6034 or visit www.washingtonhospital.org.