

My Battle With Breast Cancer

- Mary Lou Johnston

One evening after work, while relaxing at home, Mary Lou Johnston decided to perform a self breast examination. She was never one to do this on a regular basis but the idea did cross her mind from time to time. After all, at age 26, the thought of being diagnosed with breast cancer just never entered her mind and as far as she knew, no one in her family had ever been diagnosed with breast cancer. "But here I was, doing this self examination and wondering the entire time if I would know if there was something there that would be cause for concern. After all, the breast isn't perfectly smooth," said Mary Lou. "But, then I felt it. There was something in my breast and it definitely felt different." She hadn't been experiencing any pain, no loss of appetite, or any other symptoms that indicated she was not well. "But, this knot, it was real," Mary Lou recalled.

The next day, Mary Lou was at her doctor's office for an appointment. Over the next few weeks she had a mammogram and an ultrasound with the confirmation that something was suspicious.

From the results of those tests, Mary Lou was referred to a surgeon who would perform a biopsy. "So, I was off to the operating room. I remember being awake during the procedure, but at some point, I must have drifted off to sleep. My doctor woke me to give me the news, I had breast cancer.

"I instantly sat up and through tears; I told him I knew he was going to say that. I don't know how I knew, I just knew." At that point Mary Lou felt as though she was in a state of confusion. Family members had to be told and she felt panic stricken, speechless and numb. Thoughts were in a state of panic and total confusion. She had no idea how to react to the news herself, and certainly did not know what to say to her family. "I was grateful that my surgeon talked to my family and explained how we were going to start my long journey from diagnosis to treatment to recovery.

"As time passed, I found myself scared, angry, confused, sad and at times, in fear of dying. It is a real emotional rollercoaster. And yet, the Lord provided me with the will and determination to do whatever was necessary to get better," Mary Lou says. Options were discussed and it was decided that I would have a left radical mastectomy and if the cancer showed up in one lymph node, I would be referred to an oncologist for chemotherapy."

Suddenly she was facing a new fear and praying that the lymph nodes would be clear.

The roller coaster ride continued. Mary Lou underwent a left radical mastectomy on April 1. "Lord knows how I prayed someone would tell me 'April Fools' but no one did. Other than feeling heavily sedated, I didn't feel all that different. I even wondered if the surgery had taken place. I found it strange that a part of me had been taken away, yet it

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still felt like nothing was missing. I still feel that way today.” One lymph node was affected by the cancer and so Mary Lou adhered to the recommendation that she should have chemotherapy. “I had treatments with the strongest drugs that were available at the time.

“The day of my first treatment, I was so nervous and scared. I wanted to go anywhere, do anything but what I was getting ready to do. But, I knew that I had no choice. If I wanted to beat this, I had to do the chemo.” Mary Lou was fortunate that she did not experience any nausea or vomiting. She did, however, gain weight and lose her hair. “I remember waking up and seeing my hair lying on the pillow. It was then that I realized that I couldn’t just set around and wait for it to fall out. I had to take action. So, I called the hair dresser, met him at the shop and said “Shave it all off.” I recall him asking me if I was sure. I said “yes.” “We all handle things in different ways. For me, seeing my bald head, I could only laugh. To me, it was the funniest thing I had ever seen. My hairdresser placed my wig (which I had ordered some time before) on my head, styled it in the same style as my real hair had been and then I forced myself to go to a movie. My first victory against breast cancer!

Mary Lou was determined to face each hurdle in the healing process with the same head-on determination. “Breast cancer wasn’t going to take me down without a fight.” She completed her chemotherapy and then decided to have reconstructive surgery. “For me, completion of this process would make me whole again and give back to me what breast cancer had tried to take away.”

Twenty-one years passed since her first diagnosis with breast cancer. But her journey did not end there. In 2011 Mary Lou found herself facing breast cancer for the second time. Only this time, it was a more aggressive type of cancer. When the surgeon gave her the news, she responded with more calmness. “I remember thinking the Lord gave me 21 more years after the first round. Perhaps, he will give me another 21 years.” The all too familiar process started once again, and options and recommendations for treatment were decided upon. Again, determined to keep up the fight, she followed the rigorous routine of chemotherapy, surgery, radiation treatments, loss of hair, and complications with her white blood count. Reconstructive surgery will be down the road, but it is on the list.

Mary Lou says she can see the good that came out her experience. She has a fresh and stronger appreciation for life in general from spending time with loved ones to something as simple as hearing a bird chirp or feeling the wind upon her face. Being faced with a serious illness has a way of bringing things into perspective.

“I live life to the fullest and enjoy each and every day that the good Lord has blessed me with. As they say, when life throws you lemons; make lemonade. I fully intend to do just that and I will continue to walk by faith, not by fear. The Lord is with me, this I know.”

Live it Out

A yearly mammogram is the most important action women can take to detect breast cancer early, when a successful treatment is much more likely. Here are the screening guidelines for breast cancer recommended by the American Cancer Society.

Women age 40 and older: Screening mammogram every year as long as the woman is in good health. Clinical breast exam every year by a healthcare professional.

Women in their 20s and 30s: A clinical breast exam by a healthcare professional at least every three years.

A breast self-exam is an option for all women starting in their 20s. Special guidelines are used for women with a high or moderate risk of breast cancer. Talk to your doctor to determine if you fall into this category.

Women with a high risk of breast cancer: A mammogram and an MRI every year.

Women with a moderate risk: Talk to your doctor about the benefits and limitations of having an annual MRI in addition to your yearly mammogram.



For more detailed information about the risk factors for breast cancer, please visit:

www.wcchcares.com

Upcoming Events

Caregiver Support Group

Contact: Mary Williams at 228-2051

Childbirth Classes Sponsored by WCCH Women’s Center

Call 228-1756 to register or for more information

Diabetes Management Classes

Contact Barbara Patton, RN, CDE at 228-1762 for more information or to register

Congestive Heart Failure Classes

Contact Barbara Patton, RN, CDE at 228-1762 for more information or to register

Rural Retreat Health and Wellness Fair

Location: Rural Retreat Squad Building
Date: Saturday, September 29, 2012
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Bland County Festival of the Leaves

Location: Bland County Fairgrounds
Date: October 13-14

Ladies Night Out – Breast Cancer Awareness

Location: Wytheville Meeting Center
Date: Thursday, October 18, 2012
Time: Registration - 5:00 p.m. Program: 6:30 p.m.
Guest Speakers, Dr. Susan Griffin and Dr. Dalkeith G. Facey

St. Paul UMC Community Health Fair

Saturday, November 3, 2012
Location: St. Paul UMC, Church Street Wytheville
Time: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Downtown Community Christmas Parade

Sponsored by Wythe County Community Hospital
Friday, November 30, 2012
Parade begins at 6:00 p.m. down Main Street
Contact Betty Elmore at 625-8812 for registration forms.

Ladies Night Out

Helps Breast Cancer Awareness at WCCH

Ladies Night Out has become the one event each year that attracts ladies of all ages to enjoy an evening of relaxation away from the hum drum of every day life! Wythe County Community Hospital is pleased to be one of the sponsors for the Ladies Night Out, a breast cancer awareness month event. The event will be held Thursday, October 18, 2012 at the Wytheville Meeting Center; Registration begins at 5:00 p.m.

The event will run from 6:30 pm and will feature guest speakers, Dr. Susan Griffin, Family Practice and Dr. Dalkeith G. Facey, General Surgeon. An evening of relaxation for the ladies which will focus on important breast cancer issues. Various exhibitors and vendors will have a variety of displays which will also provide an opportunity to network with health care professionals on very important issues regarding women's health in general.

A new feature this year will be added to highlight "A Healthy Heart." Light refreshments will be served following the program.

Be sure to put the date on your calendar. The first 400 to register will receive a useful goody bag packed with information, gifts, and a surprise or two!



A New Day For Pain Management In Our Region

Are you one of the estimated 86 million Americans suffering from long-term pain? Fortunately, there's good news if you have a problem with chronic aches and discomfort. Wythe County Community Hospital Center for Pain Management can provide the latest techniques, therapies and medications to help you reduce the pain and start living a more active and enjoyable life.

By far, the most common type of long-term pain occurs in the back. In fact, 80 percent of adults will experience some sort of back pain during their life. Chronic headaches and pain in the joints (hip, knee, and shoulder, for example), caused by arthritis or trauma, are also very common. Abdominal pain and chest pain are other examples.

Pain management is a branch of medicine dedicated to improving the quality of life for those who have acute or chronic pain. After an initial evaluation and diagnostic tests, a specialist in pain management will determine an individualized course of treatment. The techniques used in pain management are many, from non-invasive remedies, such as massage therapy and behavioral modification, to medications such as analgesics or muscle relaxers. In less severe cases, physical therapy is often determined to be the best course of action. For more serious cases, treatment options include steroid and epidural injections.

What's important to remember is that relief from chronic pain is almost always available. So don't suffer needlessly. Our goal is to improve your quality of life. You do not have to live in unbearable pain every day. For more information, contact your primary care physician or call 228-0080.

WELCOME PAMELA SOMERVELL, M.D.

Wythe County Community Hospital is pleased to welcome Pamela Somervell, MD as the newest member of our medical staff. Dr. Somervell completed her medical degree at Saint Louis University Health Sciences Center, Saint Louis, MO and Memorial Family Medicine Residency in South Bend, IN. She is a member of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Somervell has joined Wythe Medical Associates located at 360 Virginia Avenue in Wytheville, Virginia.

Dr. Somervell enjoys raising five children, two boys and three girls. She also enjoys reading biographies and science fiction novels and crocheting and cross-stitching. Welcome, Dr. Somervell.



Pamela Somervell, M.D.
Family Medicine



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HealthPoint

WYTHE COUNTY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

HealthPoint is published as a community service by Wythe County Community Hospital. It in no way seeks to diagnose or treat illness or to serve as a substitute for professional medical care. For individual guidance, consult your physician. For more information about Wythe County Community Hospital or anything found in this publication, please call 276-228-0200.

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A Service of Wythe County Community Hospital



To Find Mr. Sandman, Sometimes You Need Medical Help

Are you always feeling tired during the day? Do you have trouble falling asleep at night? Do you snore loudly when you sleep or wake up frequently during the night? If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you may be suffering from a sleep disorder and need to seek medical advice.

Why Sleep Is So Important

Sleep is not a luxury. It is essential to your health and vitality. Most people need between seven and nine hours of restful sleep each night. There's more to not getting enough sleep than just feeling drowsy. The lack of restful sleep can lead to a number of medical conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity and even depression.

Unfortunately, most people aren't getting enough sleep. A recent study found that 40 percent of Americans need more shut-eye. And, an estimated 50 to 70 million Americans suffer from long-term sleep loss and sleep disorders.

Finding Mr. Sandman

The best way to determine if you have a sleeping disorder is to have a sleep study, also called a polysomnogram. A sleep study is usually performed in a special home-like sleep lab that helps promote a good night's rest. The study electronically records specific physical activities during your different stages of sleep. Equipped with this information, a qualified physician can detect any sleep disorders and can recommend an appropriate treatment.

Common sleep disorders:

Insomnia

You may have insomnia if it takes more than 45 minutes to fall asleep or if you wake up frequently during the night and can't fall back to sleep. Worrying about a stressful situation can cause insomnia for a few nights or weeks. Long-term insomnia, which can last for months or even years, usually requires medical treatment.

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is present when a person repeatedly stops breathing for 10 to 15 seconds or longer during sleep. It's usually caused by a blockage in the upper airways, especially in the nose and mouth. If you snore loudly, toss and turn during the night, or wake up with a headache, you may have sleep apnea. Older men who are overweight are more likely to have this condition.

Narcolepsy

With narcolepsy, a person is engaged in normal daily activities and then suddenly falls asleep for a few seconds to several minutes. In some cases, the person may remain asleep for more than an hour. Narcolepsy is caused by the brain's inability to regulate a normal sleep-wake cycle.

Restless Legs Syndrome

When you lie down to sleep, do you ever have a tingling, pulling or painful sensation in your leg? If you do, you may have a sleep disorder called Restless Legs Syndrome.

For more information about sleeping disorders, contact your primary care physician or the Wytheville Sleep Center, a service of Wythe County Community Hospital at 228-3126.