

Pulse

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DuPage County Health Department

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The purpose of this two-page surveillance update is to promote the control and prevention of disease, disability, and premature death, as well as to monitor and improve our community health status, by providing clinically relevant information and resources to healthcare professionals in DuPage County.

Breast Cancer

Rashmi Chugh, MD, MPH

Medical Officer

DuPage County Health Department

Breast cancer affects one in eight women during their lives, and breast cancer kills more women in the U.S. than any cancer except lung cancer.¹ In 2008, it is estimated that 182,460 women will be diagnosed with and 40,480 women will die of cancer of the breast.²

Many of the known breast cancer risk factors, such as age, family history, age at first full-term pregnancy, early menarche, late menopause, and breast density, are not easily modifiable. Other factors, however, associated with increased breast cancer risk (postmenopausal obesity, use of postmenopausal hormones, alcohol consumption, and physical inactivity) are modifiable. Some risk factors directly increase lifetime exposure of breast tissue to circulating ovarian hormones (early menarche, late menopause, obesity, and hormone use), whereas others, such as higher socioeconomic status, are only correlates of reproductive behavior or other factors.³

At this time, there is no guaranteed way to prevent breast cancer, which is why regular mammograms are so important. A woman's best overall preventive health strategy is to reduce her known risk factors as much as possible by avoiding weight gain and obesity, engaging in regular physical activity, and minimizing alcohol intake.³

Numerous randomized trials and population-based screening evaluations have clearly shown that early detection of breast cancer through mammography greatly improves treatment options, the chances for successful treatment, and survival. Mammography is the single most effective method of early detection, since it can identify cancer several years before physical symptoms develop. Treatment is more successful when cancer is discovered early.³

In observance of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, we invite our Board of Health President, Linda Kurzawa, to kindly share her own journey and perspective, and Marie Doll, B.S.N., Women's Health Program Manager at the DuPage County Health Department, to provide a guest editorial for our Fall 2008 issue.⁴ We also thank Melinda Lehnerr, R.N., Assistant Division Chief, Division of Epidemiologic Studies at the Illinois Department of Public Health, for her assistance.

References:

1. www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/breastcancer.html
2. seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/breast.html
3. www.cancer.org/downloads/STT/BCFF-Final.pdf
4. nbcam.org/

Special Guest Columnist

Why Me? Why *Not* Me?



Linda Kurzawa

President, Board of Health

DuPage County Health Department



What is it like to be diagnosed with *breast cancer*? Those two words strike fear into the most courageous of women. But each year, over 180,000 American women will join the ranks of women living with breast cancer.

I joined the ranks in January of 2006. Although I had been vigilant in my yearly mammograms, my annual exam in June 2005 was the first time I had any abnormality. They found a small nodule that was benign, but suggested a six month follow-up just to make sure it was remaining stable. I didn't think too much of it, and almost cancelled my follow-up because of an important meeting. I went, and was called and informed two days later that the original nodule was fine, unchanged, but they had found some-

thing entirely new that warranted further testing. Two days later, I went for an ultrasound and when they called with those results, it was not good news. A biopsy confirmed invasive breast cancer. How could this be? There is no breast cancer in my family. Why me? Then I found out the truth--why *not* me! The two greatest risk factors for getting breast cancer are 1) being a woman and 2) getting older. The fact is that one in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer.

Mine was a very fast moving cancer, since my surgery revealed it had already spread to five lymph nodes. I was lucky; my follow-up mammogram had found the cancer early. Once diagnosed, I was amazed by the number of women who had already been on this journey that rallied for support. Women diagnosed, and those that love them, have turned the tide on this disease. I personally believe that one reason we are gaining ground on breast cancer is because of our openness to talk about it. The single greatest tool we have is early diagnosis through mammogram. Found early, this insidious disease can be cured. Encourage all the women in your life to obtain an annual mammogram.

Program offers screening, treatment

Marie C. Doll, BSN

Women's Health Program Manager

DuPage County Health Department

DuPage County Health Department's "Why Wait?" Breast and Cervical Cancer Program provides screening services and treatment to all uninsured and underinsured women throughout DuPage County. This grant-funded program is a branch of the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP). The program provides services to all women from the age of 35 to 64 years, while also serving younger and older symptomatic clients. Clients that have been previously diagnosed with cancer may receive free treatment through the program.

Clients are encouraged to enroll in the "Why Wait?" Program by filling out enrollment paperwork detailing their breast and cervical history. Clients will provide a copy of their photo ID, proof of income and/or letter of support. Upon receipt of paperwork

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