

Cancer Answers

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A New Experience

At the end of October I had the opportunity to spend several hours with a wonderful organization called NACR. This stands for the Native American Cancer Research. It is an active cancer research center and so much more. They touch the Native American community in a powerful way through information and support (both figuratively and literally) through a well-trained, professional caring staff. The center is in Lakewood Colorado, not far from my home. This particular day was a special event with games, lunch, art and a balloon release designed to educate and encourage. Please allow me to share with you some of the things I experienced and learned that day both about myself and about the Native American community.

My first observation was that this is a community and culture I am very unfamiliar with. Although I felt out of my element as I walked in - it was only a few moments before I had made new acquaintances who were sharing their stories and experiences with me. Most of these women live not more than ten to fifteen miles from me and yet I was quite ignorant of the how their culture, as a whole, deals with breast cancer and what breast cancer statistics are unique to the Native Americans.

The center had planned on around twenty to twenty-five participants for the event. Imagine their surprise and delight when over fifty crowded the main area and spilled over to the outlying offices! This was, for lack of a better way to say it, a family outing. I do not want to stereotype, however, my observation was that, for the most part, these families struggle financially and live very simple lives...sometimes simply in survival mode. There were small children, husbands, teenage children, mothers, grandmothers, boyfriends and girlfriends each with their own set of problems and challenges. Yet, on this one day they united to remember those they have lost to the cancer battle and learn more about how this disease works and what they can do to protect themselves.

We played Breast Cancer Jeopardy, with each answer coming from a question about the disease. I was shocked to learn that many, if not most, were quite uniformed and unaware of simple facts and statistics. The game was a powerful means of education. Each person who answered a question correctly chose a gift from the prize table. It was such fun watching someone tell another the proper question so they too could get a prize! The gifts were very nice and everyone got something they treasured.

I learned that day that although Native American's are less likely to get breast cancer than caucasians - their chances of getting the disease at any earlier age are much higher. In fact, the High Plains Indians (the Dakota's, Wyoming, Montana and Minnesota) have the highest rate of early age breast cancer.

I came away feeling like they had given more to me than I to them. I will treasure the experience I had for a lifetime. I also came away with the realization that our job is far from finished when it comes to educating and assisting.

Ribbon Color Awareness

We are all familiar with red ribbons for HIV awareness; yellow for remembering and supporting our military and pink for breast cancer awareness. This just scratches the surface of the colors and patterns being used today for awareness. There are also many colors that have multiple causes attached to them. I thought it would be fun to list the colors and/or patterns that are associated with different types of cancer...so here goes. Pay special attention to the last three...these are for YOU!

Orange = leukemia

Yellow = bladder cancer, liver cancer and sarcoma

Green = kidney cancer and leukemia

Blue = colon cancer

White = bone cancer

Black = melanoma

Brown = colorectal cancer

Gray = brain cancer

Lime Green = lymphoma (including Non-Hodgkins)

Teal = all gynecologic cancers

Purple = pancreatic and thyroid cancer

Burgundy = multiple myeloma

Periwinkle = esophageal /stomach cancer

Pink = breast cancer

Hot Pink = inflammatory breast cancer

Amber = appendix cancer

Light Blue = prostate cancer

Orchid = testicular cancer

Clear = lung cancer

Light Pink & Blue = male breast cancer

Red & White = squamous cell carcinoma

Teal & Pink = hereditary breast cancer

Black & White stripes = carcinoid syndrome cancer

Lavendar = ALL cancers

Blue & Silver = living and/or coping with cancer

PURPLE also = CANCER SURVIVOR