

## ***Breast cancer survivor spreads the word: Prevention***

*By James Knister, M.D., a radiation oncologist at Sutter Solano Cancer Center*

Early detection of breast cancer can mean the difference between life and death. No one knows this better than Benicia resident and cancer survivor, Carol Quigley.

Quigley has always been a believer in preventive care. As the mother of four children ranging from age 9 through 20, she didn't have time to be sick. Her only hospital stays were to give birth. That was prior to January 2006, when a routine mammogram detected a small tumor in her breast.

“You just never think something like this will happen to you,” says Quigley. “I had a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach when I was told there was a definite problem and was then referred to a surgeon.”

### **Breast Cancer Facts**

One out of every seven women in America will develop breast cancer at some point during her lifetime. Thankfully, early diagnosis for breast cancer and advanced treatment options have dramatically improved survival rates in recent years. Women have a better chance of surviving breast cancer today than at any other time in history. Five-year survival rates of early-stage breast cancer are more than 95 percent.

The Sutter Health network diagnoses nearly 2,000 breast cancer patients each year and is a leading provider of breast cancer treatment in Northern California. Sutter Solano Cancer Center (SSCC) in Vallejo offers Solano County residents access to advanced detection and treatment options for breast cancer.

### **Quality Treatment**

Fortunately for Quigley, her tumor was detected early. She also began treatment quickly, having a lumpectomy in early February, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. More than a year later, she's cancer-free and extremely thankful to our team at SSCC.

“I received extremely good care,” says Quigley. “A lot of effort went into making my treatment as noninvasive as possible. Everyone was extremely kind but also aggressive with respect to doing what was necessary to give me my life back.”

In my work as a radiation oncologist at SSCC, I notice that patients usually have low expectations regarding cancer, so most are relieved to learn that there are many treatments available, even when the cancer has spread into the lymph nodes. A personalized treatment plan is discussed with each patient before any procedures are done.

We want our patients to be invested in their treatment decisions. One of the worst things about cancer is that it strips away your control, so we like to give people a sense that they are in charge in some respect.

Following surgery, radiation treatments occur daily for five to seven weeks, so I'm fortunate to get to know my patients very well. People in our field have the unique opportunity to provide a great amount of emotional support to our patients. Almost everyone starts out being anxious, but by the time we're done, they've really opened up and are better both physically and mentally. This is truly cancer treatment at its best.

### **Advanced Medicine**

New technology has made breast imaging quicker and easier. Now breast cancer often can be detected at an earlier stage when it's easier to treat. And the simple fact is that when more women get screened, more lives are saved. The switch from film-based to digital mammography systems and the addition of computer aided detection software has made detection quicker, and in some cases, more accurate.

Breast cancer prevention, detection, treatment and support services offered at SSCC include clinical breast exams (CBEs), mammography, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Although the technological advances are great, the most important thing women can do is know the facts about breast cancer and get "checked out" with regular exams by following current breast cancer screening guidelines.

### **Trusted Resources at Your Fingertips**

For women faced with a breast cancer diagnosis, Sutter Solano Medical Center—in coordination with other Sutter Health affiliates—has introduced the *Breast Cancer Notebook*, a free, 14-chapter notebook that outlines the treatment process, illustrates surgeries and exercises, and provides other valuable information.

*The Breast Cancer Notebook* is a valuable resource available to all women in our local communities. With an aim to help women make informed decisions about their care, the comprehensive notebook serves as a resource to guide women from diagnosis to treatment and provides self-care tips to prevent or alleviate the side effects of breast cancer and its treatments. It also ensures women have critical breast health information from a trusted resource at their fingertips. The one-of-a-kind guide for women is also available online at <http://cancer.sutterhealth.org>.

### **Cancer Support Group**

Research shows that patients and their family members have an improved quality of life when they have the help of a support group. Sutter Solano's Cancer Support Group meets on the first and third Wednesday of every month, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at SSCC. For more information, contact the Sutter Solano Cancer Resource Center at 707-554-5326.

### **Have You Had a Mammogram This Year?**

Getting an annual mammogram can help detect breast cancer early. The American Cancer Society recommends that women ages 40 and older have a mammogram every year. For more information about cancer programs and services available in Solano County, visit us online at [www.sutersolano.org/cancer](http://www.sutersolano.org/cancer).

Writer's notes:

Benicia patient, featured in Winter 2007 *Your Health* newsletter. **James Knister, M.D., 707-551-3400**