

Myths and facts on breast cancer

YOU HAVE ONE MORE CHANCE TO LEARN THE latest about breast cancer and strategists for early detection and long-term survival with the last in a series of "Keep Abreast" Cancer Awareness Seminar this Saturday, Oct. 21, 9a.m. at the Philippine Stocks Exchange building in Ortigas. Admission is free and open to the public.

"Keep Abreast" is a project of the Philippine Foundation for Breast Cancer Care, Inc. (PFBCI) and Philippine Wacoal Corp., to provide substantial knowledge and insights about breast cancer to the Filipino public. Experts in the field – including the best experts there are and survivors of breast cancer – will share their knowledge of and experiences with the disease in the seminar. One of them is Suzette Andrews, herself a cancer survivor who mined the experiences and knowledge gained in her struggles to found "Big C" magazine, which provides cancer survivors and their families the knowledge and skills needed to cope with the disease and make out of their circumstances.

Another speaker at the seminar is Dr. Cristina L. Santos, Chairman of PFBCI, who has made cancer awareness a personal and professional mission. Two other breast cancer survivors – Perla Imperial, a businesswoman and realtor, and Cecilia Espiritu, a homemaker and a mother of two – will deliver testimonials on their personal experiences and how these led them to becoming breast cancer advocates through the PFBCI.

It was the cancer experience of the relatives that inspired Glenda Garcia, a movie and

TV personality, to join the foundation as a volunteer, helping spread breast cancer awareness as well as advocating a healthy lifestyle to improve one's chances in avoiding or becoming the disease.

STILL as part of the "Breast Cancer Awareness Month" here are some "Myths and Facts" contained in hand-outs of the "Keep Abreast" campaign.

Myth: A woman has little or no risk of breast cancer if she has no family history of breast cancer.

Fact: More than 75% of women with breast cancer have no family history of the disease. Simply being female puts all women at risk.

Myth: Estrogens cause breast cancer.

Fact: No data has shown that estrogens at birth control and hormone replacement pills cause breast cancer. However, if breast cancer is already present, estrogen stimulate its growth.

Myth: Breast cancer does not occur on young women.

Fact: Breast cancer is most common on women older than 50, but it can and does occur in women at all ages.

Myth: Women with large breasts have a greater risk of having breast cancer.

Fact: Size has no relation to risk. It is, however, sometimes more difficult to examine large breasts because there is more tissue to mask a lump.

Myth: An injury to the breast can cause breast cancer.

Fact: Cancer is not cause by hurting or bruising the breast. However, when cancer is already present, it is often detected when a touches her breast after an injury.

Myth: Most lumps in the breast are cancer.

Fact: Most lumps in the breast are not cancer. However, it is important to obtain a definite diagnosis instead of assuring that a lump is harmless.

Myth: Removal of the entire breast is safer than segmental mastectomy and radiation therapy.

Fact: Survival is much similar for patients who have breast conserving therapy and those who undergo total or modified radical mastectomy.

Myth: Women with a strong family history of breast cancer should be considered breast conserving therapy.

Fact: A strong family history of breast cancer is not a contraindication to breast conserving therapy. The decision about which treatment to use should take into account several factors such as stage of the breast cancer, body build and lifestyle.

Myth: Once a woman has been treated for breast cancer, she should avoid becoming pregnant.

Fact: Pregnancy need not be avoided by women who are free of cancer and not undergoing treatment. Successful pregnancies have occurred even in women who have undergone abdominal

surgery for the TRAM-flap reconstruction.