

# Keeping abreast of breast cancer...

It is said that while half a female population of the world may have breast cancer, the other half is afraid of getting it. The grim facts are hard to ignore: One in eight women will get breast cancer in her lifetime. The risk of getting breast cancer increases with age; every woman is at risk. Every 13 minutes, a woman dies of breast cancer.

Today, breast cancer is the leading cancer in woman aged 15 to 54 years old, and the second in women, 55 to 74 years old.

The mere mention of breast cancer is enough to make women shrink in fear as they see visions of the grim reaper. But brace yourself! In the fighting breast cancer, your best weapon is to know the enemy. Which is why the Breast Cancer Awareness Month is being celebrated this month. And for the second year, two breast friends – the Philippine Foundation for Breast Cancer Care, Inc. (PFBCI) and Philippine Wacoal Corporation – recently conducted their “keep abreast” cancer awareness seminar.

Certainly, breast cancer patients are not alone in this bruising battle versus the Big C. For one, there's family. We remember

ever supportive husband Jim Paredes of the Apo fame bravely declaring after his wife Lydia was .....

**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: 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: Cancer cannot be found unless a lump is felt.**

Fact: Mammography can detect early cancers because a lump can be felt.

**Myth: If I detected a lump in my breast, it means I have breast cancer.**

Fact: Most lumps detected by woman on self-examination are not cancer. If you detect a lump or change in your breast, it is important to report this to doctor right away so that he/she may examine you and determine whether further tests are needed.

**Myth: A breast lump may be surgically removed to find out if it is important.**

Fact: Many breast cancers can be diagnosed without a surgical procedure.

**Myth: It is always necessary to surgically remove the lymph nodes in the armpit in order to determine if they contain cancer cells.**

Fact: Sentinel Node Biopsy can tell your doctor if cancer cells have spread to your axillary nodes and may make axillary node dissection unnecessary.

**Myth: If mammography reports come back as “negative” there is nothing else to worry about.**

Fact: Mammography does not show 10 to 15 percents of breast cancers. Any suspicious mass must be further investigated.

**Myth: Mammogram is painful and can harm the breast.**

Fact: During mammography, the breast is compressed. Although this can be uncomfortable, it is not harmful to the breast and is usually not painful. Scheduling the mammogram after the menstrual period, when the breast is less tender, will reduce the discomfort.

**Myth: A breast will always be painful.**

Fact: Most early breast cancers do not hurt. However, some are associated with unusual sensations in the breast, including soreness or burning.

**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: 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: Underwire bras compact the lymphatic system of the breast and cause breast cancer.**

Fact: According to American Cancer Society, there are no scientifically valid studies that show a correlation between wearing bras of any type and the occurrence of breast cancer. In further notes that the Singer and Grismaijer's study was not

conducted according to standard principles of epidemiology research and did not take into consideration other breast conserving therapy and those who undergo total or modified radical mastectomy.

**Myth: Once the lymph nodes are removed from the armpit, there will always be swelling of the arm.**

Fact: Some women experience swelling of the affected arm (lymphedema). However, with less radical surgery and careful attention to the proper use of the hand and arm of the affected side, swelling is not common and usually not severe.

**Myth: Women would not have immediately breast reconstruction. It is best to wait a couple of years to make sure the cancer does not recur.**

Fact: With proper surgical removal of the cancer in the breast, there is no reason to delay reconstruction in most patients. In fact, immediate reconstruction is often in most patients since only one surgery is required and the cosmetic results can be better.

**Myth: Radiation therapy burns and destroys the skin of the breast.**

Fact: The X-ray used to treat breast cancer can cause temporary redness of the skin, much like sunburn. This can be soothed with an ointment, and it diminishes after completion of treatment.

**Myth: Women receiving radiation therapy should avoid physical contact with friends and family because of possible radioactivity.**

Fact: The form of X-ray energy used to treat breast cancer does not linger in the body. Other than slight tenderness of the treated areas, there is no reason to avoid physical contact with others.

**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.

**Myth: Chemotherapy is given only to women with advanced breast cancer.**

Fact: Chemotherapy is now recommended for most women with breast cancer. Even women with very early disease, it usually improves survival and reduces the possibility of recurrence.

**Myth: Any ache or pain after treatment of breast cancer should be considered as possible sign of recurrence.**

Fact: Your body continues to have common aches and pains, such as those caused by arthritis, regardless of cancer. It is important to discuss specific new sensations with your doctor.

**Myth: A woman who has had breast cancer must have bone scans, CT scans, x-rays, and blood tests at least once a year for the rest of her life.**

Fact: Although these additional tests may be needed in certain cases, a woman who has remained cancer-free for five years usually requires only an annual physical exam and mammogram, and perhaps an annual chest x-ray, if she received radiation therapy as part of her cancer treatment.

**Myth: Women who've had breast cancer can never take hormones.**

Fact: Although this issue is controversial, some women are now given estrogen following treatment of breast cancer if the cancer is early stage and not sensitive to estrogen.

**Myth: Women who had breast conserving therapy rather than modified radical or total mastectomy generally have a more active sex life after treatment.**

Fact: Women who have breast conserving therapy may feel comfortable with their body, particularly when