

Think Pink Be A Survivor - Breast Exam Steps

Written by Valecia Weeks, CPT, LMT
Friday, 12 October 2012 10:36



I remember getting that dreadful call, “Your mammogram is abnormal. We need you to come in for more testing.” ...more mammograms, ultrasounds, and 2 biopsies later, they told me it was only fatty tissue.

Man, I’ve never been soooooo happy to be called “fat” in my life! Everyone who gets “the call” has a different story though. I’d like to introduce you ladies to a diva whose story is quite a bit different than mine. Her name is Dina Davis of Houston, Texas. She is a 42 year old woman who is now going into her 6th Chemotherapy treatment at MD Anderson Hospital. Ms Davis was recently diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma of the left breast, as well as in one lymph node.

Back in May 2012, Dina went in for a routine well woman exam, as we all should do at least once a year, just to find out she had a lump in her left breast. One of the staff members of the doctor who requested the follow up told her immediately that she needed a double mastectomy before even receiving the biopsy report. Fortunate for her, a social worker helped her submit an application for Breast and Cervical Medicaid, which she was approved for in a few days. At that point she transferred to MD Anderson Hospital. They made the decision to try chemo first then the mastectomy (if necessary) after running many tests. One of the initial tests they ran was to see if the cancer had spread to other organs, which the doctors were sure it had. Dina said she knows that it was because of prayers of family and friends that the results indicated that the cancer had not spread to other organs. So far her body is taking well to the chemo, and she’s waiting on test results to see whether or not it is working.

I had the opportunity to see Dina last Wednesday just prior to her chemo treatment. On Saturday she decided to take advantage of JC Penney’s “free cuts for Cancer” where she

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completely lost her hair while hair stylist Tilesia Weeks shampooed it. But Diva Dina was prepared...she had her handy dandy wig and had Tilesia to layer it into a natural look where she could keep her Diva profile.

DINA'S ADVISE, "I had my first tumor when I was 17. It was benign and they removed it. After that I had to get mammograms every year. I did get behind [on my mammograms] before I was diagnosed recently. That is why it is so important to not miss not even one year." Let's take her up on her advice and not only get yearly well woman exams; but use the techniques below to do self exams monthly. Like our mamas used to say, "An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure."

Hands-On Self Breast Examination

Step 1

Lie down on your back and place your right hand underneath your head.

Step 2

Use your left hand to examine your right breast. Keep your left hand straight, fingers together, and feel your right breast with the pads of your index, middle and ring fingers. Move your hand in small circles to feel for lumps. Overlap the circles, working your way around your entire breast. Do three circles for each section of the breast at different pressure levels. Apply light pressure, medium pressure and hard pressure to feel different levels of the breast tissue. Feel from the bottom of your breast at the top of your ribs, to your underarms and up to your collarbone. A good way to make sure you do not miss any part of your breast during the exam is to start at the nipple and work your way out to the outside of your breast.

Step 3

Examine the right breast again using small up and down motions to feel for lumps. Report any unusual lumps to your doctor.

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Step 4

Squeeze the right nipple to see if any discharge comes out. Report nipple discharge to your doctor.

Step 5

Place your left hand behind your head and repeat the self breast examination on your left breast using your right hand. Repeat the previous steps.

Sometimes we as sistahs take for granted that the doctor will find “the lump” but it is very important not only to rely on the once a year routine exam but also be proactive in performing monthly self-examinations.

I want to thank Dina for sharing a part of her life with us. Ms. Davis has such a positive outlook on life, and she is full of joy and laughter and looks very positively into her future.

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