

Three friends support one another to health – and happy holidays



Left to right: Debby Wescott, Patricia Swanson and Kimberlee Grob

Debby Wescott, Patricia Swanson, and Kimberlee Grob didn't know one another when they were diagnosed with breast cancer several years ago. Yet due to the circumstances that brought them together, they developed a special friendship. What they found in going through treatment of their cancer *together* was the added support and understanding all cancer patients need. They continue to derive strength from their shared experience.

Meet the friends

At 43, **Debby** discovered a lump under her arm, which she admits she ignored for several months. When she finally went to her doctor to have it checked out, it was another three weeks before a biopsy was performed. Three days later, she found out she had breast cancer.

Patricia was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2002 at the age of 40. In all, she had six months of chemotherapy, two surgeries, and radiation treatment. Patricia had been a cancer patient for 11 months when she began to see Debby and Kimberlee on a daily basis at radiation. She and her husband Scott were also new parents, struggling to take care of an active toddler for the first time.

Kimberlee was 41 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She has a supportive boyfriend and four sisters with no history of breast cancer.

How the friends met

Patricia recalls meeting Debby and Kimberlee at an East Bay support group meeting in the spring of 2003. "They both struck me as upbeat, optimistic individuals with great coping and humor skills, although I didn't really get to know them well until we started radiation treatment at the same time that November." By luck, the women ended up with back-to-back appointments at the radiation center.

"I had planned to bring my husband with me to watch our newly adopted daughter while I received radiation," says Patricia, "but Debby and Kimberlee, who are both mothers with teenagers, quickly took over watching Lia so my husband could go back to work. For almost all of our 33 treatment sessions, I would bring Lia into Debby's treatment room as she was getting dressed, and Debby would take her to the lobby until Kimberlee arrived, and then Kimberlee would watch her until I completed my radiation appointment. Many days we overlapped while waiting, and that's when we really bonded, talking about our cancer treatment, our lives, and our everyday ups and downs."

Getting support

Debby's husband Tim encouraged her to find a support group right away, and not wait until other

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The Christmas Poster (with apologies to Supercuts)

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What Customers Are Saying:

"I went in saying I want to look like Susan Powter and by Golly, they did it!!"

...

"Only \$100,000 and it lasted months longer than my usual haircut!"

...

"Once is Enough!!"

...

(Happy Holidays from three former hair clients Debby, Kimberlee, and Patricia)

One day at radiation treatment, Kimberlee told Patricia that someone had complimented her on her beautiful, short, silver hair, which at the time was just growing back after six months of chemotherapy. Kimberlee said she told the person, "I don't think you'd want to get this hairstyle!"

"Since we were just getting our hair back and finding it odd to have curls or a different hair color, hair was a frequent topic of conversation among the three of us," says Patricia. "The next day, I was driving by a Supercuts hair salon and I began to wonder what their posters would look like if all their clients had been through cancer treatment. The thought was too funny not to put into print and share with our oncologists. We had our pictures taken and I made up a poster with a 'Happy Holidays — Hair by Kaiser' message!"

Meet Lydia Trepes, MA



“Now, I offer my help to all patients who cross my path, and it is very rewarding.”

People frequently ask me, “How can you work in Oncology? Isn’t it depressing?” The truth is, I love working in Oncology and no, it is not depressing to me. It really depends on your attitude and approach to life.

Six years ago, I joined Kaiser Permanente as a medical assistant. I would float through many departments, including Oncology. The Oncology Department was always my favorite because of the hardworking and compassionate staff and the wonderful patients I would meet.

To me, the hard part of Oncology is when you are on the receiving end. About seven years ago, I lost my one and only grandfather to cancer. It was difficult feeling that there wasn’t anything that I could do to help. Now, I offer my help to all patients who cross my path, and it is very rewarding.

I’m known as the “chemotherapy scheduler,” but I do more than just make appointments. In between running to and from the lab, I ensure that patients have their questions answered, their medicines squared away, and disability forms filled out, and I perform other miscellaneous duties. Often I get the opportunity to lend a listening ear and/or a supportive hug. In my spare time, I volunteer, along with a former Oncology employee, to teach the “Look Good, Feel Better” class for women diagnosed with cancer. This too, has been a wonderful experience for me.

I really enjoy my job and, in my opinion, coming to work is like visiting my second family. From what I have heard from our patients, they feel the same when they come for their chemotherapy.

What to do after cancer treatment

by Howard Kleckner, MD



The end-of- treatment day has finally arrived. This is clearly the day you have been awaiting, and yet it is one of mixed emotions. What happens next? You have heard about individuals who have remained cancer free for years. You have probably also met people, perhaps during your treatment, in whom the cancer has recurred – sometimes within months or years of their initial therapy.

You may be asking: Which tests do I need to have done and how often? How frequently should I be seen? What should I look for?

General signs and symptoms that could indicate the recurrence of cancer include:

- persistent pain lasting several days or weeks
- new lumps
- shortness of breath
- night sweats
- swelling
- weight loss or gain
- unusual bleeding
- new rashes

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (www.nccn.org) and the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org) have excellent Web sites where you can access follow-up specifics for your own cancer.

Recommended scans and tests

When you’ve had breast cancer

- History and physical exam every 4 to 6 months for 5 years, then every 12 months
- For a mastectomy, annual mammogram
- For a lumpectomy, mammogram 6 months post radiation therapy, annually thereafter
- For women on Tamoxifen, pelvic exam every 12 months if the uterus is present
- No special lab or scans routinely recommended

When you’ve had colon cancer

- History and physical exam, including digital rectal exam and stool test for occult blood, every 3 to 6 months for 2 years, then every 6 months up to 5 years
- Complete blood count (CBC) and liver tests every 3 to 6 months for 2 years, then every 6 months up to 5 years
- If the Carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA), or tumor marker test, was elevated at diagnosis, repeat every 6 months for 2 years, then annually for 5 years
- Colonoscopy at 1 year; repeat in 1 year if abnormal or 3 years if normal

Remember, these are guidelines; the specifics of your case will need to be discussed with your personal physician.

Source: National Comprehensive Cancer Network/American Cancer Society

Fighting cancer with good nutrition

by Ann Gordon, MPH, breast care coordinator



After a diagnosis of cancer, many people begin thinking more about the connection between diet and health. While no diet can guarantee that you’ll never get cancer, research suggests that a healthy diet plays an important role in preventing new and recurrent cancers.

You don’t have to eat lots of one kind of food or take loads of supplements to eat smart. Variety and moderation are the key to making healthy food choices over a lifetime.

Eat well to remain healthy

The National Cancer Institute and the American Institute for Cancer Research make these diet recommendations for cancer survivors.

- Maintain a healthy weight by eating appropriate portion sizes and being physically active.
- Select foods low in fat and salt.
- Eat fiber-rich foods.
- Eat lots of vegetables and fruits.
- Limit alcohol intake – moderate drinking is 1-2 drinks per week.
- Reduce consumption of salt-cured, smoked and high-heat cooked meats.
- Take a daily multi-vitamin supplement.
- If you smoke, quit. Talk to your doctor about how Kaiser Permanente can help.

Welcome to Munira Gulzar, RN, and Angela Lam, RN



"I never thought

I would leave the Emergency Department and go anywhere else until I came to the Oncology Department," says **Munira Gulzar, RN**, who has worked in our department since August.

Munira has been at Kaiser Permanente for

nine years, eight of those years in the ER. "I've always been a Type A personality," she says. "I liked ER and its big adrenaline rush — we were going all the time. Oncology is a different kind of set-up with a different kind of care. Because I am a 'people person,' this has turned out to be the perfect switch from ER for me."

Munira started her career in nursing 18 years ago in Pakistan, where she received her diploma in nursing and midwifery through Aga Khan University Hospital. She was a pediatric nurse before getting married and moving to India, where she worked in Bombay at Prince Aly Khan Hospital.

Arriving in the United States in 1991, Munira first had to complete exams to qualify to work here. After several moves, she arrived with her family in California. She got a job in ER at the Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center and transferred to the Kaiser Permanente Hayward Medical Center. Munira says she now "enjoys every moment!" "I've



Left to right: Angela Lam, RN and Munira Gulzar, RN

been told I have a very bubbly personality and I enjoy talking to people a lot, so this department is just perfect for me."

Angela Lam, RN, wanted to become a nurse since high school, and has worked as a nurse for 21 years. Her first job was on the Oncology floor of the

Kaiser Permanente Anaheim Medical Center. "I loved that job and having the unique opportunity to work with patients, sometimes at the very end stage of their life," she says.

When Angela began working at Kaiser Permanente Hayward Medical Center, she "floated" between the Medical, Surgical, Postpartum and Emergency Room units. "As a mother of two young children, I appreciated having pediatric nursing skills," she says. When Angela worked as a home health nurse, she enjoyed the one-on-one time she had with patients. Once back in Pediatrics, she became a telephone advice nurse.

"I find it a joy and a privilege to work in the Oncology Clinic today," says Angela. "It's an awesome responsibility to not only give chemotherapy, but to encourage our patients, no matter what stage of the journey they're at. Also, it's a true pleasure to work with the warmest, friendliest group of staff I've yet to meet."

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decisions were made. "Fortunately, a breast cancer seminar was scheduled soon after I was diagnosed, so we were encouraged by Ann Gordon to attend. That was the best thing we could have done," she recalls. "We learned a lot in a short period of time and were surrounded by wonderful survivors." Debby's husband did all the reading and research, telling her "only what I needed to know." Having his support enabled Debby to focus on her education (she was enrolled at Cal State Hayward) and their two daughters, and get through her treatment.

"Having Patricia and Debby in my life during this time was a huge blessing," says Kimberlee. "We could laugh together, cry together, and be depressed together. We celebrated one-quarter inch of hair growth, a new eyelash; we laughed about losing fingernails, and cried about how scared we were."

"I have a great family," adds Kimberlee. "My mom flew in from Idaho and was with me during four of the eight chemo treatments. My four sisters flew in for my 42nd birthday and they all came to my seventh chemo treatment. I have a boyfriend who did all the reading, asked the questions, and told me how beautiful I was — when it was hard for me to look in the mirror. Having my family's support was crucial, but having other women going through what I was going through is what kept me sane."

*"I will share this (experience)
with these gals
for the rest of my life."*

—Debby

"Cancer treatment can make a huge pit in your emotional backyard," observes Patricia. "Family, friends, and medical professionals are very good at helping you focus attention away from the pit and onto other elements of your life. Most of the time, you aren't sure if they know the pit is even there. When you talk to someone who has been through cancer treatment, you know not only that they see your pit but they also know how important it is for you to be constantly aware of it and to work around the negative effects it can have on your emotional landscape."

"Life goes on, you know?" says Patricia. Debby has since had a third (reconstruction) surgery, and graduated from Cal State; Kimberlee has moved to a new house with her boyfriend; and Patricia is caring for her little girl. "I will share this (experience) with these gals for the rest of my life," says Debby. "I never would have met them if it weren't for my cancer diagnosis, and it's a big lesson."

Some great nutrition resources include:

KP Nutrition Advice Line - call 510-675-2141
Leave a message with your nutrition question, and a KP dietician will call you back with an answer within two working days.

Eating Hints for Cancer Patients brochure, free from the National Institutes of Health
Call 800-4-CANCER (422-6237) Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time

AICR Nutrition Hotline - call 800-843-8114
Monday-Friday, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Pacific Time

Nutrition of the Cancer Patient and Nutrition and the Cancer Survivor brochures
Order up to six, free. American Institute for Cancer Research — www.aicr.org

The Cancer Survivor's Nutrition & Health Guide
by Gene Spiller, PH, & Bonnie Bruce, DrPH, RD
Available at KP's Health Education Centers

Nutrition & Cancer Treatment Seminar at
The Wellness Community in Walnut Creek
Call 925-933-0107 for dates and times.

Expanded clinical research program holds promise

by Kathy Walker, RN, AOCN, clinical research nurse



The Oncology Clinical Trials Program continues its rapid growth, with 38 trials now open to all northern California Kaiser Permanente members. These trials cover most of the major cancers as well as some seen less frequently. Currently there are trials open for cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, lung, ovary, uterus, stomach, pancreas, kidney, and brain and for melanoma and lymphoma.

Each trial is specific not only for the cancer type but also for the disease stage. Stage refers to how far the cancer has progressed. Stage I means the cancer has been detected early and is confined to the area from which it arose. Stage IV means the cancer has spread (metastasized) to another part of the body. For some types of cancer, we have trials for treatment for all or most stages. For example, there are nine trials now open for breast cancer that are studying new treatments for the earliest stage to the most advanced. This is an exciting and hopeful time in cancer research. New drugs that target a particular gene or biological process in the growth of malignant cells are showing great promise, and Kaiser Permanente members are fortunate to have access to some of these



drugs through our Clinical Trials Program. While there are side effects with all medications, agents that interfere with a particular process necessary for cancer cell growth often are less toxic than standard chemotherapy drugs, which affect both normal and malignant cells in the same way.

An example of this is cetuximab, which inhibits a protein called epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), known to promote growth of malignant cells. One of our colon cancer studies looks at combining cetuximab and a standard chemotherapy

drug used for colon cancer that has metastasized; the goal of the study is to determine if this treatment is better than standard chemotherapy alone. Another example is the drug Avastin™, which was discussed in the Summer 2003 issue of *Outlook*. Avastin prevents blood vessel formation to tumors, blocking the blood supply needed for tumor growth. At the time of our 2003 article, Avastin was not commercially available. It has since been approved by the Federal Drug Administration for use in recurrent colon cancer. This drug continues to be studied in clinical trials for other types of cancer, including earlier-stage colon, breast, lung, pancreatic, and kidney cancer, to name a few. Several trials with this drug are open at Kaiser Permanente.

Our oncologists offer clinical trials as one treatment option when a member has a particular type or stage of cancer for which there is a trial available and the physician feels the trial is both appropriate and potentially beneficial. To learn more about clinical trials, you can contact me at 510-784-4533, or stop by my office in the Oncology Clinic.

Jay Vallortigara, RPh, receives GAPS award



Our Oncology pharmacist Jay Vallortigara isn't the boastful type, but the department has a new reason to be especially proud of him. Jay was recently awarded Kaiser Permanente's Gracious and Professional Service (GAPS) award. To be considered, an employee must be nominated by one's peers.

The GAPS committee selects four employees each quarter who are exemplary in their ability and willingness to listen to the concerns of co-workers; are friendly, cheerful, and polite, even under stress; are sensitive to the feelings of others; possess excellent knowledge, skills and experience; exhibit high standards of performance at all times; go the extra mile to help others; are successful problem-solvers; are trustworthy, even in a crisis; and always get the job done.

"I've never jumped out to get special honors," says Jay, "but it's nice to get the recognition."

Jay joined Kaiser Permanente in 1980, serving as fill-in/float pharmacist/outpatient chemotherapy replacement until three years ago, when he joined the Oncology Department. He is currently handling some additional responsibilities for a colleague on leave, so he is particularly busy – but not too busy to be gracious and professional. Congratulations to Jay for a most deserving honor!

LifeLines

LOCAL CANCER CLASSES & SUPPORT GROUPS

Breast Cancer Support Group
Held every other Wednesday.

Cancer Support Groups
Numerous groups available.

I Can Cope
6-session class for newly diagnosed patients and their families.

Look Good, Feel Better
One-session class on self-care and beauty tips for women undergoing chemotherapy, held every other month on Mondays.

Mind Body Medicine Program
8-session workshop for those interested in improving their health & managing stress.

Prostate Cancer Support Group
Monthly support group for patients and family members.

For more information on these programs, call Kaiser Permanente Health Education
Hayward and Union City:
510-784-4531
Fremont:
510-248-3455

WEB SITE RESOURCES:
www.kaiserpermanente.org
www.permanente.net/doctor
<http://hayward.kp.org>
<http://fremont.kp.org>
www.cancer.gov
www.cancer.org

Note: Web site links are provided as an educational tool. Any medical content that you feel may be important to your health should always be discussed with your Kaiser Permanente physician.

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We want to hear from you! Send your comments, ideas and stories to the Oncology Department, Kaiser Permanente Hayward Medical Center, 27400 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward 94545 or send an email to: Howard.Kleckner@kp.org.