

The 2020 deadline

Breast cancer needs to be defeated, not just treated



Janac partners are also cancer survivors

Sixth World Breast Cancer Conference starts in Hamilton today and we're expecting a report on progress to eliminate the disease by 2020. Photo of Janet Cockburn, president (right) and college Loraine Horvath, who operate Janac-a mastectomy wear company. They are also both breast cancer survivors. Gary Yokoyama/The Hamilton Spectator

Five-day event expected to draw more than 500 delegates

Janet Cockburn had breast cancer. Twice. But she doesn't refer to herself as a survivor. She says she is a breast cancer thriver.

"The scariest thing is you survive cancer, but you are always living with it. You always have that little bit in the back of your mind, maybe it will come back," said Cockburn, 59, who lives in Hamilton.

She was 43 when diagnosed the first time and had a mastectomy. In 2009, she was diagnosed again. She was shocked. This time she had two lumps. After consulting with

her doctor, she had another mastectomy. Once again, she is cancer free. She is a firm believer in self examinations, mammograms and followups.

Fellow Hamiltonian Loraine Horvath was diagnosed 15 years ago.

“There was no history of breast cancer in my family,” so the diagnosis was “quite a surprise. It resulted in a mastectomy and some chemotherapy,” said Horvath, 56. “I did not go through radiation, but I did lose my hair.”

Both Cockburn and Horvath are vendors at the 6th World Conference on Breast Cancer this week at the Hamilton Convention Centre. Seminars and workshops are being offered to give participants from all over the world the opportunity to learn and discuss issues that are important to them.

Wednesday began with a progress report. Fran Visco is a 20-year breast cancer survivor and president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC). She announced the coalition’s Breast Cancer Deadline of 2020, and asked the audience to change the way they approach the disease.

“If you look at the billboards, the marketing campaigns and the media coverage, it’s primarily about screening and awareness,” said Visco.

She said we need to focus on the end of breast cancer completely and bring back a sense of urgency. She cites increases in federal funding for research, unprecedented training courses, a system of access to care and critical trials with the scientific community as some of the NBCC’s accomplishments. But there is much work to be done.

Breast cancer accounts for nearly a quarter of all cancers in women worldwide. In 2008, there were 1.4 million women diagnosed with breast cancer and about 450,000 deaths. Most of those diagnoses occur between the ages of 55 and 61.

Despite years of awareness campaigns, expanding screening programs, increased fundraising and research efforts, Visco says there has been little impact on key statistics.

“Breast cancer incidents and mortality rates have not changed significantly. By 2030, with no major changes in prevention or treatment, it is estimated that 750,000 will die from breast cancer each year worldwide,” said Visco.



Stacey Escott
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The NBCC believes in their 2020 deadline. They feel the state of technology and science will make this possible. Painting an archway pink won't cut it, Visco said. It's time to get aggressive.

Breast cancer is an international disease. A different seminar spoke about people who are affected and don't speak English. They need proper tools so they can actively participate in fighting the disease and make informed decisions about their care.

"Different communities have different words that mean different things," said Lori Santoro, a speaker from CancerCare Manitoba.

She said there was a lack of training materials, fact sheets, DVDs and audio programs to help people understand their care and options.

Santoro's organization has translated information on several cancer treatment topics. Written translations are available for 11 languages. Some have audio options. Topics include chemotherapy, fatigue, radiation and emotional impacts of cancer. The information is free and available on their website www.cancercare.mb.ca. They also offer interpreters that are funded by the provincial government at no charge to patients who need them.

"It gives them the ability to ask questions because they have that baseline of information, they can make better treatment decisions and informed decisions. It may also help facilitate talking with their health care team and their families," said Santoro.

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