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METRO DETROIT

Locals encourage, educate others through cancer prevention month

By Sherri Kolade ✉

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Ruth Ebenstein met Ibtisam Erekat at an Israeli-Palestinian breast cancer support group. (Photo provided by Debbie Feit)

⌚ Posted February 1, 2017

METRO DETROIT — Finding out you have cancer can be emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically and financially draining.

Finding friendship and resources through that arduous journey, however, might be just what the doctor ordered.

Developing a deep, sister-like friendship is what happened to Ann Arbor resident Ruth Ebenstein, who was diagnosed with breast cancer at 42 years old when she had a nursing baby. She was afraid she would die, according to a press release. She spoke recently at Jewish Family Service, 6555 W. Maple Road in West Bloomfield, about her

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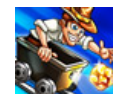
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journey.

Ebenstein joined an Israeli-Palestinian breast cancer support group, where she met Ibtisam Erekat, a Muslim Palestinian woman Ebenstein now calls her kin.

February is National Cancer Prevention Month, and Feb. 4 is World Cancer Day.

"I had to speed wean," Ebenstein said of the start of her cancer journey, adding that she received an email from a friend asking if she wanted to join the Israeli-Palestinian cancer support group. When she walked in the room, she was "surprised to see so many hijabi women."

"I had seen them on the streets of Jerusalem, but I didn't have any close friends" who wore a hijab, she added.

Ebenstein said that while it was a "shock" to see so many Palestinian women, a sense of togetherness came over her.

"We are all the same — a breast cancer survivor," she said.

Ebenstein said that she and Erekat hit it off well because they have had similar experiences with their children and marriages.

She added that her friend has a "daring sense of humor."

The women traveled together on a trip to Bosnia in 2012 to meet other women who cross religious and cultural lines to support one another.

"There, our friendship really blossomed. ... It was really incredible," she said. "After that, I was determined to get to know her and embrace this friendship."

Beaumont Health's Dr. Ruth Lerman, who heads up a Warren-based cancer survivor program, Living After Cancer with Ease, said the class she teaches encourages reducing stress and growing from within.

She teaches mindfulness-based stress reduction, which has been scientifically shown to strengthen the immune system and decrease inflammation, the fear of recurrence and cancer-related symptoms.

Lerman said that while making friendships is not the primary focus of the class, friendships do occur.

"The first relationship it works on is yourself," Lerman said.

She said that the eight-week, 2 1/2-hour class "requires a lot of commitment."

The class teaches meditation, gentle yoga, mindful eating and communication skills to cancer survivors.

Lerman added that other research shows that attendees of similar classes have changes in their brain — the stress-reactive areas are smaller and less active.

"People who are done with cancer treatment or (are) high-risk for cancer can really benefit from this," Lerman said.

The classes, which are currently in session, resume in March and are free to anyone, but registration is required.

Participants must be 18 or older and have completed their cancer treatments, according to Bob Ortlieb, media relations coordinator at Beaumont Health.

For more information on the upcoming class, email LivingWithEaseAfterCancer@beaumont.org or call (248) 551-5454.

At the Beaumont Cancer Center, Farmington Hills, Director Bethany Parish said they focus on healing and compassion.

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“One of the big things we are focused on here is healing and compassionate care for the patients, along with offering cutting-edge technology,” Parish said. “Not only do we have amazing services for patients, but we can maintain close, personal experience with our patients.”

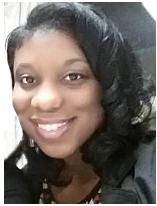
Parish said many of the patients return kind words of thanks and appreciation to the cancer center staff through online patient surveys.

Through radiation oncology, the cancer center probably sees over 400 patients a year.

“Throughout the course of the year, we offer several free cancer screening events and awareness prevention events,” Parish said.

For more information, call the cancer center at (248) 471-8120.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Staff Writer Sherri Kolade covers Farmington, Farmington Hills, Farmington Public Schools, and Oakland Community College for the Press. Sherri Kolade has worked for C & G Newspapers since 2013 and graduated from Central Michigan University.

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