

Life after breast cancer symposium hits mark

BY JUDITH DOKER BERNIE
SPECIAL WRITER

There's a reason Jane E. Brody's a columnist for *The New York Times*. She has well-researched, well-framed, well-vetted opinions. And she didn't hesitate to let the 300-plus crowd at a recent Life After Breast Cancer Symposium at The Community House in Birmingham know what they are.

Brody, a personal health columnist who also covers science and medicine, led off the day-long session. It was sponsored by Sharing and Caring, a volunteer breast cancer support and educational organization affiliated with William Beaumont Hospital.

Dr. Lynn Hartmann, a medical oncologist from the Mayo Clinic, and Dr. David Spiegel, chairman of the psychiatry department at Stanford University, are other nationally-known experts who spoke later in the program.

Brody, it turns out, has more than a writer's take on breast cancer. She, like the women who had come to hear her, has been diagnosed with and treated for the disease. Her reaction when she learned she had a small, relatively non-aggressive tumor was: "Well, at least I don't have a fatal disease." And she returned to her office and a day's work.

"I knew that breast cancer, especially the early stage cancer I believed I had, was highly curable and unlikely to kill me any time soon," she told the group. "I knew I could tolerate what my doctors said I needed to do to assure my survival." She also knew she could continue to pursue all the activities she loves—writing, a variety of sports, going to museums and concerts, travel.

Terror, she said, keeps some women from having regular mammograms and clinical exams, even though prevention is the key to survival. To chatter that terror for her live audience, as she does for those who read her column, Brody took aim at this heavily-used statistic: one in eight women in this country will get breast cancer sometime during

her lifetime - if she lives to 85 or beyond.

"But what does that statistic really mean?" she asked. "When you're 80 years old and you haven't yet had breast cancer, your odds of getting it during your remaining years are no longer one in eight; they're much lower because you've already escaped several at-risk decades."

Once breast cancer is diagnosed, she told these patients and survivors, "terror gets in the

way of clear thinking — about therapeutic options, about ways to minimize side effects, about how to get back to a normal life. Terror can lead to depression and stress, and these in turn can interfere with self-healing."

Maggie Griner, board president and a founder of Sharing and Caring, enjoyed Brody's directness.

"I liked her statement that a breast is 'not a functional unit' at least not since I stopped nursing my twin sons 30 years ago!"

It is not a leg or an arm or a part of my face that I miss most. What I miss is my vital internal breast like a kidney, liver or heart. I think it's hard for women who are actually going through it to have the perspective she said she had.

Still they had to be encouraged that although breast cancer is the most common serious cancer

in women, "It is not nearly the killer most women seem to think it is." Lung cancer, Brody reminded, kills 87 percent more women than breast cancer — 56,000 a year. And heart disease kills 11 times more women — half a million a year.

Brody got a big round of applause for her follow-up question and answer session.

"She's an incredibly dynamic person," analyzed Michael

Carmichael of Bloomfield Township, who attended with his wife Pam. "I always enjoyed reading her columns and her books."

He was among a handful of men in the audience. Asked why he had come, Carmichael said: "We've been through the whole breast cancer episode. It's sort of a joint project. That's what marriage is about."

"We're very much in favor of Sharing and Caring," he added. "You need a lot of support."

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Longacre House has many leisure courses

Starting the first week of April, the Longacre House of Farmington Hills is offering a variety of new classes for spring and some for summer as well.

Aerobic kickboxing, cartooning, delightful desserts, healthy cooking, discovering the magic of Italy, floral design, modern jazz, lyrical dance, summer watercolor, tai chi and kung fu are on the course menu.

Returning classes include beginning tai chi/qi gong, healing kung fu, self defense, yoga, power fit yoga, women's strength training, photography with Monte Nagler, quilting, hand applique and quilting machine applique.

Other classes being offered again are drawing (youth), watercolor, mixed media, intermediate chess, psychic potpourri, psychic readings, sign language, piano with Kelly Kirby, private piano lessons, ballroom dance, country line dance, basic belly dance, digital photography, web page production, being a landlord and small business start up.

Call the Longacre House at 477-8404 to sign up or for more information.

Nursing home industry is hearing focus

A public hearing of the House Democratic Nursing Home task force will be held 7-9 p.m. Friday, April 14 at the Farmington Hills City Hall.

State Rep. Andy Neumann, a Democrat from Alpena, will chair the meeting. He asks that all interested persons attend, whether to give perspective about nursing home issues or just to listen.

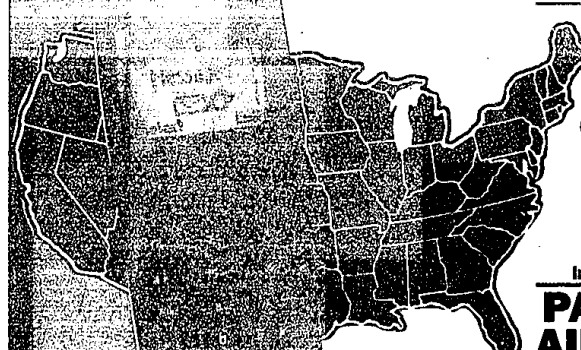
The hearing will be in the Farmington Hills city council chambers, 31555 W. 11 Mile Road.

For more information, call Neumann's office, toll-free, at 877-ANJY-108.

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