

Male Breast Cancer:

THE DISEASE DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE

| BY JENNIFER DECKER AREVALO *NURSEZONE* CONTRIBUTOR |

Stunned silence. “That was my reaction when my physician told me I had breast cancer,” said 55-year-old Bill Griffith, co-anchor for KGTV “10News Morning Edition” and “10News Midday” in San Diego, California.



“I had undergone a lumpectomy, for what I thought was a benign breast disorder, and was in the doctor’s office for a simple post-op follow-up to get the stitches out,” Griffith explained. “My

physician had just looked at the biopsy report before walking in. I think he was as shocked as me.”

According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 1,450 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed among men in the United States in 2004. Breast cancer in men accounts for less than 1 percent of all breast cancer cases. Fewer than 500 men will die from breast cancer in 2004, compared to more than 40,000 women.

As Griffith began his battle with breast cancer, he recorded his thoughts and experiences in an online journal. This outlet proved to be invaluable, as support poured in from the community and around the nation.

However, it was his inspiration to others that is now making a difference. After seeing Griffith talk about the disease on TV and reading his journal, two men in San Diego County went in for testing and, unfortunately, learned that they also have breast cancer. Consequently, Griffith formed a local support group to help these men cope with the disease. “As I help them, they in turn help others, like a chain of support,” Griffith added.

Taking it one step further, Griffith is

also working with the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation to establish a “Man to Man” support group similar to the one sponsored by the American Cancer Society.

“The Komen Foundation ‘Man to Man’ program has two purposes,” said Griffith. “The first is to provide support for other men with breast cancer. But, it will also provide support for male spouses, family members and friends of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer.”

Not only was the online journal therapeutic for Griffith, but it also helped to increase public awareness of the disease, and as that increases, hopefully more men will take notice of any changes in their breast tissue, such as the development of lumps, dimpling of the skin or a bloody discharge from the nipple, and see their doctor. Since very few physicians ever encounter male patients with breast cancer and do not normally consider this when making a diagnosis, it is up to each man to be persistent and request a mammogram and biopsy.

“Because I don’t feel embarrassed or stigmatized to have a ‘woman’s disease,’ I have written and talked candidly about my experience,” he said. “As a result, I have found that other men with cancer, be it prostate, testicular or breast, feel more empowered to openly discuss their issues and concerns.”

Jennifer Decker Arevalo, MA, is a freelance writer and health care journalist.

Read Bill Griffith’s online journal: www.10news.com/billsbattle

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