

Mammography Technician Diagnoses Her Own Breast Cancer



For 20 years, Edna Murray worked as a stockbroker on Wall Street. The high stress job eventually took its toll on her health. Edna was diagnosed with cervical cancer at the age of 35. She recovered but soon lost her zest for her demanding career. When she was laid off as part of a corporate merger, Murray

took a long, hard look at her options. "I wanted to go into a career where I could help women," recalls Murray. Coincidentally, she went for a screening mammogram and was intrigued. "I thought, 'I could see myself doing this!'" She returned to school and became a licensed mammography technician.

Murray had no family history of breast cancer, but given her medical history, Murray was encouraged to receive annual mammograms. When she was 46, Murray's mammogram alarmed the technician; Murray demanded to see the film and knew immediately that something was amiss. "The calcifications were grouped kind of funny and I said to myself, 'I'm going to need a biopsy.' I was kind of numb but I was already diagnosing myself."

Sure enough, Murray was diagnosed with a very early stage of a non-aggressive type of breast cancer. She had it removed immediately and required no chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

Breast cancer is often a silent disease, with virtually no symptoms, but it is often completely curable if diagnosed in its early stages. In 1980, the national five-year survival rate for women diagnosed with early stage breast cancer was about 74%; today that number is 99%. There are currently more than 3.1 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. One out of eight women will develop breast cancer, yet the majority have no family history of the disease, making it all the more important for women to get an annual mammogram.

According to the New Jersey Department of Health, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among New Jersey women and the second leading cause of death, after lung cancer, attributed to cancer in the state. In 2014, 7,488 New Jersey women were diagnosed with breast cancer. The rate at which new cases of breast cancer are being diagnosed in Sussex County, as well as in

the rest of the state, is stable, according to the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control. The county's breast cancer death rate is also falling, in accordance with state and national trends. However, the disease contributes to the death of 1,300 New Jersey women annually. Access to breast cancer screenings and optimal treatments is an urgent public health issue.

In 2016, Murray relocated to Sussex County and began work at Newton Medical Center's Breast Health Center. She is employed as the lead mammography technician, where in addition to performing mammograms, she administers bone density tests, assists with biopsies, and monitors record-keeping and department procedures. She encourages women who are nervous about getting a mammogram to be proactive with their own health care. "Get a mammogram! What is scarier: cancer or a little pinch? You will feel a sense of relief once it's done."

As for her own health, Murray credits the support of her husband, Brian, as well as her positive attitude with helping her to navigate through the emotional and physical aftermath of her diagnosis. "When I was first diagnosed, I thought, 'here we go again.' But, if you have a positive attitude and good mental focus, you can beat anything. Be hopeful and listen to your doctors."

Free Breast Health Services Available

The New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJ CEED) Program, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of New Jersey, provides funding to all twenty-one counties in the State for comprehensive breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal cancer education, outreach, and screening. Men and women whose income is under 250% of the Federal poverty level and have no insurance are eligible for the program. Free mammograms and pap tests are also available through the NJ CEED program; follow-up diagnostics, including additional mammography views, breast ultrasounds, and biopsies can also be provided. Interested participants are encouraged to call 973-579-0570, extension 1246 or 1248. In addition, Newton Medical Center will provide a free mammogram for women who qualify through the Newton Medical Center Foundation's "Mammograms Save Lives" program. Those without health insurance are encouraged to contact Newton Medical Center's Education/Outreach office at 973-579-8340 for more information.

