

Impact

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School of Nursing program receives Komen grant

Carol Yarbrough of Galveston is a confessed high achiever, conscientious business owner and worried mother.

"As the oldest child in my family," said the self-employed accountant matter-of-factly, "I always took care of other people, and felt that was what I was supposed to do." Unfortunately, that sense of obligation takes a personal, physical toll.

Thanks to a new program of the School of Nursing, Yarbrough has a new, more healthful attitude. A breast cancer survivor, Yarbrough first participated in and is now a facilitator for the course, called the Mind, Body and Spirit Educational Program for Breast Cancer Survivors (MBSP).

The Houston affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation recently awarded a grant of more than \$44,000 for UTMB to conduct the program in Galveston County.

The MBSP gave Yarbrough an even larger reward. "This program empowered me and gave me permission to recognize that I have needs—spiritually and emotionally, as well as physically—and to address my needs first," said Yarbrough, mother of two.

"It's incredible the effect your mind has over your body," she said. "I used to worry about things I had no control over—I just worried and worried.

"Now, as a result of going through the MBSP, I am aware when I start to worry. I just say, 'No, I have a choice here.' Before, it was a habit—in the past, my worries and anxieties would run rampant and take a great physical toll on my body. Now I know how to change my worries into more productive ways of thinking and acting."

Dr. Carolyn Kinney, director of the MBSP and principal investigator under the grant, agrees stressful life experiences can have an effect on the body. Also a breast cancer survivor, Kinney faced a great deal of stress in the three years before her cancer was diagnosed. "I do not believe any one event was instrumental in my diagnosis of breast cancer," she said, "but taken collectively, the events foreshadowed what was to come, and made me realize I needed to change the way I approached life."

For both women, facing breast cancer and finding the spiritual, emotional and physical power to change their thoughts and their attitudes about their lives inspired them to reach out and offer what they had learned to other women facing breast cancer.

"You realize that what initially seems like a devastating experience can be a turning point," said Kinney, associate professor in UTMB's School of Nursing. "The experience provides you with an opportunity to see life in a new way. You rearrange your priorities and you realize new knowledge and skills are needed to implement the new priorities."

With support from Dr. Mary Fenton, dean of the School of Nursing, Kinney studied with Denise



From left, Denise Rodgers, who designed Mind, Body and Spirit Educational Program, Dr. Elizabeth (Bets) Anderson, Dr. Carolyn Kinney, principal investigator, and Carol Yarbrough.

Rodgers, executive director of the Association for Development of Mind/Body Potential, in Tulsa, Okla. Rodgers developed the program, offering it first to multiple sclerosis patients in 1994. It proved so beneficial to them that she modified it for cancer survivors. Working with a small group in Tulsa who had various stages of cancer, Rodgers documented an average 55-percent reduction in depression and a 29-percent improvement in spiritual well-being in those participating in her program. All the participants in the cancer group exceeded their predicted survival times.

A 12-week MBSP is currently offered in Galveston under Kinney and Rodgers' supervision. With the Komen Foundation grant, the School of Nursing can provide the same growth opportunity for other women in Galveston County, where the incidence of breast cancer is higher than the rest of the state.

In Galveston County, 103 women per 100,000 population were diagnosed with breast cancer in 1995 (the latest figures available), according to the Texas Cancer Registry. Among women in the state of Texas, the incidence rate is 95.6 breast cancer diagnoses per 100,000 population. The rate of death from the disease is 22.9 women per 100,000 population in Texas.

"We are truly pleased with the support the Houston affiliate of the Komen Foundation is providing with this grant," said Kinney. "This is an empowering program that gives women ways they can assert greater control over their lives at a time they feel most vulnerable. Through the Komen grant we are able to offer the program to more women and test its benefits using various research methods."

Previously, Kinney taught the course to two other groups, one in Galveston and one in Austin, and found a reduction in depression and an improvement in quality of life and spiritual well-being in participants, similar to what Rodgers found. Further, participants said they felt an increased sense of optimism about their future and a greater sense of control over stressful events in their lives.

The program uses a combination of approaches, such

as meditation, guided imagery and other spiritual, mental and emotional practices. "Participants learn how to use self-empowering tools to manage their anxieties—their day-to-day stresses, as well as those associated with the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer," said Dr. Donna Morris, co-director of the program with Kinney.

Morris, associate professor in the School of Nursing, said other research shows "guided imagery and visualization practices can lead to physiological changes that help strengthen the body's natural defenses and immune functions." That is why she, a breast cancer survivor herself, believes in a mind, body and spirit approach. "Relaxation techniques also have been shown to reduce pain, nausea and other side effects of traditional cancer treatments," she said.

Added Yarbrough, "The more skills and tools a woman has, the better she is able to cope with whatever comes her way. What we're learning is a lifelong process that teaches us to help ourselves while we're helping others."

The 12-week MBSP sessions in Galveston are being co-led by breast cancer survivors Yarbrough and Karlyn Pearl, a UTMB adjunct faculty member. Another series will begin in September, to be led by Pearl and Dr. Elizabeth (Bets) Anderson.

"We are truly honored to have the involvement and support of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation as we work to introduce this rich educational program into our healing care," said President John D. Stobo.

"We believe we have a responsibility to the women in our community who face the devastating reality of breast cancer," he said. "We wish to serve them—not just in battling the cancer cells attacking their bodies, but also in supporting them as individuals enduring the mental and emotional burdens of the breast cancer experience.

"Through this educational program—the finest we know of—we are seeking to teach these women how to transform their suffering into a gift, an opportunity to grow and learn in a way they would otherwise not have believed possible."—Joanna Bremer