

Health Notes

By Audeen Wagner

BREAST CANCER



October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and we hear much about various groups working toward a cure, such as the Susan B. Komen Foundation. Susan Komen died of breast cancer in 1980, and the Foundation established in her name is an important source of information and support for breast cancer patients, as well as raising millions of dollars for research.

It's amazing how far we've come since 1980; so much more is known now about diagnosing and treating breast cancer, and especially in awareness – a breast cancer patient can make educated decisions about her treatment and care. Women are also urged to "self-examine" for signs of breast cancer.

While the incidence of breast cancer is on the rise, the good news is that the survival rate is rising significantly. There are more than two million women living in the U.S. who have been diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer, and about 87 percent of them will survive at least five years – most will lead a full life and never have a recurrence. The best chance for survival, of course, is when the cancer is detected early. In fact, when cancer is confined to the breast (i.e., found early), the 5-year survival rate is over 95 percent.

What are the risk factors? Who will get breast cancer? No one knows for sure. It is known that one in every 10 American women will have breast cancer in her lifetime. Experts say that the primary risk factor for breast cancer is simply being a woman! The majority of women who get breast cancer have no risk factors except being a woman – and getting older. The danger of getting breast cancer increases with age.

Prevention measures (mammogram, self breast exam, annual clinical checkups) are so important because of the nature of the disease – cancer cells may be growing out of control before any symptoms appear. It is important for all women to do breast self-exams every month and to have clinical breast exams at least every three years beginning by age 20, and every year after age 40. Experts recommend that women over 40 also have a mammogram every year – younger if you have a family history of breast cancer.

Mammogram A mammogram can find many cancers before they can be felt. Fortunately for Vernonia women, a "Mammovan" comes to Vernonia every month. It is a simple x-ray procedure, doesn't take much time, and is pain-free. A letter is sent to each patient following review of the picture. All women over 40 should have this screen done annually. (For the uninsured, Oregon has a plan to help. Based on family income, you may be able to get help paying for this and other women's healthcare screenings. This is NOT a charity program, but a way to help people who don't qualify for insurance programs, or for those who 'fall through the cracks' of the system. In addition, there is a program called "Providence Assistance" that can help).

Breast self-exam (BSE) Learn the normal look and feel of your breasts, and check for changes every month (just after your period is the best time). If you no longer have periods, do the BSE on the same day of each month. Many women have a normal pattern of "lumpiness" in their breasts. The important part of monthly checks is to detect any changes in that pattern, or find any new lump in the breast or underarms. If any new or different lumps are detected, you should make an appointment right away to be checked.

The clinic has several different handouts on the subject, including a new one out from the American Cancer Society regarding self examination. They are designed to teach us to examine ourselves each month.

Clinical breast exam. A breast exam by a health care provider should be part of your regular medical checkup. It includes a visual exam and carefully feeling the entire breast and underarm area.

This chart is a reminder of which exams should be done at your current age:

AGE 20 TO 39	FREQUENCY	AGE 40 AND UP	FREQUENCY
Breast self-exam	Once a month	Breast self-exam	Once a month
Clinical breast exam	At least every 3 years	Clinical breast exam	Once a year
		Mammogram	Once a year

Mammovan schedule: After reading the above, why not call for an appointment for a mammogram? Next visit to Vernonia: November 17. Call the clinic at 503-429-9191 to get on the schedule – you never know when this might be

a life-saving event!

Change in phone coverage: If you need to talk to a caregiver before hours, you can now call the clinic at 7:00 a.m. Office hours have not changed, but the phones are open at the earlier hour. Sounds like another small way that the clinic is giving better service to the community!

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Free nicotine patches available from Oregon's Tobacco Quit Line

For the first time, all smokers who call Oregon's Tobacco Quit Line will be offered free nicotine replacement patches to help them quit smoking, public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services DHS said October 5.

Two weeks worth of patches, shown to increase success in quitting tobacco, will be provided while supplies last.

"Nicotine replacement therapy, such as patches, greatly increases the probability that a smoker or chewer will successfully quit," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist in DHS.

Patches gradually reduce the amount of nicotine in the bloodstream during a six-to-

eight-week treatment period, Kohn explained, a gradual approach that really helps people quit.

Generic patches can be purchased over the counter for \$2.21 to \$3.15 each (name-brand patches cost more), so the cost of the remaining six weeks of patches is approximately \$92 to \$133.

This can represent big savings. Buying a pack of name-brand cigarettes every day for a year costs about \$1,600.

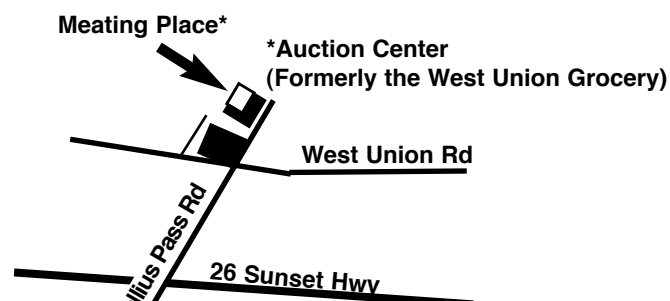
Oregon tobacco users interested in receiving free patches should call the toll-free Oregon Tobacco Quit Line at 1-877-270-7867 or 1-877-266-3863.

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