

## **BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH – DEALING WITH THE DIAGNOSIS**

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

Whose life hasn't been touched by Breast Cancer? October marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time set aside for awareness, education, and empowerment of women. The statistics are staggering! 2.4 million Breast Cancer survivors are living in the US today. (The Avon Foundation) Every woman diagnosed is someone's friend, wife, mother, sister, niece, or aunt. How can any of us remain immune to this disease that affects one in eight of American women?

With emphasis on awareness, research, early detection, prevention, and treatment, there is HOPE for those diagnosed with Breast Cancer. Nonetheless, from personal experience with my family, and professional work with cancer support groups, I've learned that hearing the "C" word is perhaps one of the most devastating events imaginable! Patients and families feel stunned - forced to face the reality that we humans are mortal! Life as we know it changes abruptly and we are bombarded with emotions - shock, fear, and loss. We are propelled into the unfamiliar world of doctors, medications, treatment choices, medical terminology, insurance companies, and financial concerns.

Flooded with feelings, we may isolate ourselves to protect against emotional ups and downs. Friends and loved ones don't know what to say and may avoid the subject. We experience a sense of loss and we grieve – for our health and our dreams - and life as we knew it is suddenly turned upside down.

If you or someone you love is diagnosed with cancer, remember, help IS available. With advances in treatment, you can feel hopeful. Talk to your doctor or hospital about support groups. Call organizations such as Cancer Alliance of Naples or the American Cancer Society and learn about programs that are right for you. Spend time with your family and friends. Re-evaluate what is *truly* important to you. Take a support person to your doctor visits. Talk about your feelings. Find a spiritual outlet. Focus on the things you enjoy. And, if you need it, ask for professional help. You don't have to go through this alone.

For more information, call Ellen Harris, LMHC at 239-404-0862.

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