

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month: Money-Related Stress Link

by vcmorris - Thursday, October 01, 2009

<http://thethinpinkline.com/2009/10/01/october-is-breast-cancer-awareness-month/>

It's no surprise that financial issues can cause depression. But a new study by researchers at Ohio State University's Comprehensive Cancer Center found that money-related stress had a stronger link to depression symptoms among breast cancer patients than even stress related to the recent death or illness of a loved one (<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/depcanc.htm>).

This study is important to me. It has been 27 years since breast cancer claimed my Aunt Erleen - my mother's eldest and only sister and yet I am still drawn to information/studies that address what other issues play into this disease and how we can better understand and support loved ones dealing with it.

My Aunt Erleen *always* did memorable things - like the time she strolled down the center aisle at my high school graduation so that she could be up close to snap the moment I received my diploma - and caught everyone on the dais like deer in the headlights from the blinding flashes of her camera and new fangled movie camera draped around her neck.

Or, the time she said she was ready to "have a California *experience*" - and declared since she'd *never* had a massage or been in a hot tub in her life - could I, her then-San Francisco resident niece - arrange it for her. I did. It was memorable. It was memorable because the setting was so lovely. It was memorable because my Mom, my young daughters and two of my best friends were part of Aunt Erleen's California moment.

It was also memorable because that's the night she told us she had breast cancer. In the midst of this loving coven of women - young and old, blood ties and heart ties - my Aunt Erleen was, as usual, very clear. "This," she said, "is how we're going to handle this."

As the months passed and her condition worsened, Aunt Erleen's resolve became our family's culture. Though she had relocated from Virginia and lived in southern California with my parents and grandmother, she would buy a plane ticket to come see me and my family in San Francisco, take it with her to her chemo treatment and - more often than not - get on the hour-long flight to northern California right after.

She said that ritual helped her "win a few battles with feeling *unwell*". How's that for a memorable understatement? She said that keeping her spirits up despite the cancer was best done in the company of pure love: kids. Mine.

I rarely *saw* my Aunt Erleen depressed even though I know other worries played heavily on her mind. But my Mom later told me that money matters and huge mounting medical bills were what most debilitated her sister's stamina. While the Ohio State University study *cannot prove* that money concerns are a cause of depression among breast cancer patients, researchers say the link *suggests* that

financial difficulties appear to be related to higher levels of symptoms of depression.

At the National Breast Cancer Month website (http://www.nbcam.org/patient_questions_answers.cfm) - there's extensive, good information provided to what are considered the most asked questions about this disease (including the fact that while breast cancer occurs primarily in women, men can also develop breast disease; and while male breast cancers tend to be smaller than female breast cancers when they are found, they have more often spread beyond the breast).

But the website's first mention of financial information and breast cancer is listed as *other risk factors* and presented at the end of the Q&A:

- **Q: Will health insurance pay for screening mammograms?**

A: Regular screening mammograms are covered by the U.S. government's Medicare and Medicaid programs and other private health insurance plans (women should check their own insurance plans for individual details). Free or low-cost mammograms are available for women without health insurance in many locations. For a program near you, contact the CDC at (888) 842-6355 .

- **Q: Will Medicare pay for screening mammograms?**

A: Yes. Medicare covers mammography screening every year for women age 40 and older who are Medicare recipients. Yet, eligible women and their doctors may not know about this important benefit. A series of publications regarding this benefit are available in English and Spanish. For more information about Medicare coverage, contact the Medicare toll-free hotline at (800) MEDICARE or the Medicare Web site, www.medicare.gov.

- **Q: How can women get low-cost or free mammograms?**

A: For information on low- or no cost mammography screening, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at (888) 842-6355 or visit their Web site at www.cdc.gov. Women seeking mammograms at a reduced rate are urged to make their appointment early in the year, as space may be limited. To find a breast-imaging facility, contact the National Cancer Institute at (800) 4-CANCER.

Perhaps the Ohio State University study will help move the correlation between breast cancer, money-related stress and depression to a bit of a higher profile.

Here's to your health and wealth.