

MOMS 2 MOMS

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Ovarian Cancer Mom with many hats -- artist, aerobics instructor & cancer survivor

By: Liz Martin
Moms2Moms Feature

Laura Slocum, of Dallas, is “Mom” to two grown boys, Drew 20 and Alex 18, who have recently ventured out of the nest and into college life. Symbolic of the many years she dedicated to raising her family Laura has donned many hats, including that of chauffeur, videographer, coach, referee, artist, artisan, and aerobics instructor. Undoubtedly, however, the most poignant of all is that of cancer survivor. Laura was diagnosed with stage III ovarian cancer in 2009 but, aside from surgeries and rounds of chemotherapy, her outlook is far from what one might expect. As she will attest, there have been times when she has needed to step back and regroup a bit, but this amazing woman has continued on with her life—barely missing a step or two along the way.

As she looked back, Laura recalled the boys’ participation in sports from an early age. “We gave them opportunities to try the sports they liked—we traveled for ice hockey and soccer for years, and I coached boy’s soccer for eight years, as well. They were fun and busy years. I have to say that my husband Bartt and I put the kids first and supported them in all that they were involved in, and we enjoyed every minute as a family.”

When she considered her recent diagnosis, Laura added, “I have to say that I feel very fortunate that I wasn’t diagnosed when the kids were younger. I don’t know how moms do their treatments and take care of little ones - I think that would be just awful.”

As they are older now, the boys are aware of Laura’s illness and help out when they come home on breaks. “They don’t say all that much, but they usually call to check in on me during treatments. We’ve been keeping everything positive here. I believe that God has a plan for me, so I’m just doing the best I can everyday. We want them to have their college lives and do what they need to do right now at school.”

Laura’s support system—which is headed by her husband, Bartt—has grown above and beyond her immediate circle of family and friends. A special group of people have recently joined the ranks. Enter ETSY (www.ETSY.com), a worldwide web portal comprised of individual artists and vintage “stores” from more than 150 countries, with a list of sellers that number in the hundreds of thousands—including Laura.

To enable Laura’s on-line friends and ETSY peers to follow her medical journey, her sister started a blog (<http://staytuned09.blogspot.com/>) in June of 2009 that has attracted more than 100 ‘friends’, several of whom started ETSY Project Embrace (EPE), a group of ETSY store owners who have agreed to donate a portion of their sales to cancer research. Since August, EPE has raised more than \$7,000 in honor of Laura. She explained, “It’s pretty amazing, considering that I only actually met two of these people. When you read the blog, 98% of the comments come from ETSY sellers.”

“We have a ‘thread’ where people write in everyday about their sales, donations to ACS (American Cancer Society), about their everyday lives, and to also request prayers for all kinds of things. These people will fill up four or five pages a day with comments. They all knew when I had my surgery and everyone had something to say about it on the thread, through comments on my blog, or our store emails, or ‘convos’ (conversations). For instance, I post when my next chemo is and I will have a bunch of convos right before I go, wishing me well. There is another of our team members who also just underwent surgery for cancer, and they support her in the same way they support me. They are a fantastic bunch of people!”

When she’s not selling or blogging on-line, Laura continues with her busy—but not too busy—lifestyle. “Since after my surgery, I’ve painted a little and continued to make jewelry. I help out at Ochman’s on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and do some of their minor repairs. They have been good enough to allow me to come in when I felt up to it, and they sometimes send work home for me when I’m not up to going into the store.”

“Even though I’ll be doing another year of chemo, my test results for ovarian cancer have been normal every month since my first treatment. So, I’m thankful for that. My doctor is very aggressive and I’m happy about that. I just won’t (probably won’t) have hair for another year or so.”

Laura’s most recent blog entry received many comments from ETSY friends as far away as Germany, so we will end her profile with this sentiment: “How wonderful to hear those magic words - cancer free! You’ve been through so much, yet your positive attitude and zest for life shine through, and you are an amazing inspiration to us all.”

In visiting the ETSY website, this writer came upon an amazing group of artists and vintage sellers who, through www.ETSY.com, have found a universal platform by which to purvey their wares—and some amazing items at that! Be sure to visit the website and experience the on-line camaraderie with ETSY Project Embrace and a network of sellers who continue to donate a portion of their sales to the American Cancer Society, in Laura’s honor.



Although the rates of ovarian cancer have been steadily falling since the 1980s, ovarian cancer is still the eighth most common cancer among women. Here are some other statistics, courtesy of the American Cancer Society and the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance.

* About 21,550 new cases of ovarian cancer will be diagnosed in the United States in 2010.

* A woman's risk of getting invasive ovarian cancer during her lifetime is about 1 in 71. However, her risk of dying from the disease is 1 in 95.

* Almost half (45 percent) of women with ovarian cancer are still alive at least 5 years after diagnosis (this is called the 5-year survival rate). The propensity to survive 5 years after diagnosis is higher the earlier the diagnosis.

* Less than 20 percent of all ovarian cancer is found at an early stage. Approximately 75 percent of ovarian cancer cases are diagnosed at an advanced stage after the cancer has spread beyond the ovary.

* Research suggests that between 70 to 90 percent of all women with ovarian cancer will, at some point, have a recurrence of the disease.

* From 2001 to 2005, the most recent period for which data is available, the median age at diagnosis for ovarian cancer was 63 years.

* Symptoms vary from woman to woman and many times depend on the location of the tumor and its impact on the surrounding organs. Many of the symptoms mimic other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or urinary incontinence.

Don’t take chances with your health, schedule and attend your regular health care check-ups and mammograms

Cervical Cancer Screening

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women. In the United States alone, it is estimated there were 11,270 new cases of cervical cancer in 2010 and 4,070 deaths from the disease. The two groups of women with the highest rates of cervical cancer are those from ages 35 to 39 and those from ages 60 to 64. Early detection is the key to treatment and survival.

Understanding HPV - Cervical cancer is a cancer of the cervix, or the organ that connects the uterus to the vagina. It is almost always caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), which up until recently was a little-known virus. It has since become a household name. This is a sexually transmitted virus that affects the mucous membranes in humans. HPV is spread through sexual skin-to-skin contact. Penetration is not necessary to spread the virus. Men and women can be affected by HPV, and there are different strains. HPV that causes genital warts won't necessarily contribute to cervical cancer.

PAPTests - The only way to prevent HPV is to abstain from sexual contact. In recent years a vaccine has been approved for the prevention of HPV. Early detection of cervical cancer is also essential. This is obtained through a PAP test. The incidence of cervical cancer has decreased in developed countries around the world because of an increase in the use of screenings and appropriate follow-up treatment.

The PAP test or PAP smear is named after Dr. George Papanicolaou who first developed the test. A sample of cervical cells are taken and observed under a microscope.

A woman can have HPV for years and not know it. It stays in the body and can lead to cervical cancer years after infection. There are often no symptoms of HPV or cervical cancer, therefore PAPs are the single best way to detect it. If there are any symptoms, they may include unexplained bleeding or pain.

Treatment - If cervical cancer is caught early, it can usually be treated successfully. A woman may still be able to have children even after the cancer is caught early enough. However, most treatments for cervical cancer make a woman unable to have children afterward. Depending on the stage of cancer treatments may include:

- * Cone biopsy to remove the cancer
- * Simple hysterectomy to remove the uterus and cervix
- * Hysterectomy and removal of pelvic lymph nodes with or without removal of both ovaries and fallopian tubes
- * Radiation therapy, using high-dose X-rays or implants in the vaginal cavity to kill cancer cells
- * Chemotherapy

Regular pelvic examinations and PAP tests can save a woman's life and prevent cervical cancer from developing. Women with any unusual symptoms should not hesitate to speak with their doctor.

Keep Kids Healthy As Winter Gives Way to Spring

When days get longer and the weather begins to warm up, it's a sure sign that spring is around the corner. After months of cold temperatures and gray skies, just about everyone looks forward to spending time outdoors taking in the sights, sounds and scents of the season. But with temperatures rising and flowers, trees and grasses beginning to bloom, it's also time to protect kids from seasonal allergies and sun exposure.

Here are some tips for keeping kids healthy all spring long.

Look out for signs of seasonal allergies. Hay fever, also known as allergic rhinitis, is a common problem in both infants and children. Common symptoms include repeated sneezing, a stuffy or runny nose with clear drainage or congestion, itchy eyes and nose, throat

clearing, sore throat, and / or a cough that tends to worsen at night and in the morning. Kids with seasonal allergies also tend to breathe through their mouth a lot and may have dark circles under their eyes.

Limit kids' exposure to common allergens. While it's impossible to keep kids clear of all outdoor allergens, there are some common-sense steps that can help minimize their impact, such as keeping kids indoors and closing windows in the early morning when the spring tree pollen count is highest, not hanging clothes outside to dry and bathing kids at bedtime to help minimize nighttime allergies.

Protect skin from the damaging effects of spring sun. After being indoors for much of the winter, kids are eager to spend as much time outdoors as possible. To protect their skin during the spring months, break out the sunscreen and their favorite hats. When choosing a sunscreen for a baby, toddler or young child, look for a product that offers broad-spectrum UVA and UVB protection with a minimum SPF of between 15 and 30. Also consider a product that is water resistant and one that is hypoallergenic and free of fragrance.

Don't forget about eye protection. The lenses of children's eyes are extremely sensitive. Just as taking care of kids' skin can help prevent skin cancer in adulthood, eye protection can protect kids' eyes from developing certain conditions, like cataracts and macular degeneration, later in life. Everyone, including kids, should wear sunglasses year-round, but especially during spring and summer. Make sure to choose sunglasses that provide 100 percent UV protection. Hats with brims large enough to shade the eyes, while not as effective as sunglasses, also offer moderate protection from the sun.



Resources

The Power of Music for Pain: Women in labor, surgical patients and more turn to music for help

(PR Newswire/MS) -- Medical practitioners and researchers increasingly tout the benefits of music for a variety of people suffering with pain, including women in labor, burn victims and patients recovering from surgery.

Medical studies demonstrate the ability of music to enhance well-being, reduce stress and anxiety, encourage relaxation, and alleviate pain. Music is believed to direct physiologic effects through the autonomic nervous system, such as causing the release of endorphins that suppress pain.

While music has been utilized for healing for centuries, it is only during the past 20 years that music therapy has emerged as an established health profession.

Today, the American Medical Association accepts music therapy as a component of medical care, and music is currently used in medical settings to address physical, emotional and cognitive needs of individuals. In 1991, 90-year old Ida Goldman who walked with assistance to testify before the Senate demonstrated the value of music for pain, "Before I had surgery, they told me I could never walk again. But when I sat and listened to music, I forgot all about the pain."

Several studies from noted medical journals support Goldman's experience. And the research has led to an increased use of music in hospitals.

This year, the growing trend of using music to help women reduce the pain of labor inspired top artists such as The Dixie Chicks to donate music to a benefit CD of soothing songs for the March of Dimes called "Stork Tunes: Songs for A Happy Birth Day," which was specifically compiled to appeal to moms in labor.

To tap the power of music, visit www.musictherapy.org and www.storktunes.com.



Questions to Ask Your Doctor

According to the data reports offered by the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, based on information compiled, the average time spent with a doctor in the U.S. during an office visit is 22 minutes. Arriving prepared can help ensure you have all of your questions answered, and it will help enable you to feel reassured upon leaving your appointment.

You have the right to understand a particular illness and question the doctor on anything you don't understand. It's also helpful to jot down notes on what the doctor says, particularly information about prescription dosing, so that you can review the information when you return home and are in a setting with fewer distractions.

Use these questions as a guideline for talking with your doctor.

For a particular condition:

- * What is wrong with me?
- * What causes this type of problem?
- * Is this condition serious?
- * Is this condition contagious? Should I worry about giving it to others?
- * Are there any activities, foods or medicines I should avoid while I have this condition?
- * How can I prevent this from happening again?
- * What type of treatment do you recommend?

If testing is recommended:

- * What is this test and why is it needed?
- * How long will the test take?
- * Is it painful?
- * Do you perform this test in the office or do I need to go to a lab?
- * Are there any risks involved?
- * How do I prepare for this test?
- * Are there any foods or activities I should avoid?
- * What side effects should I look for, if any?
- * How long does it take to receive the results?

When given a prescription:

- * What does this medicine do and why is it being prescribed?
- * What are the side effects?
- * What happens if I do not take this medicine?
- * How long do I need to take this medicine?
- * Should it be taken with or without food?
- * What do I do if I miss a dose?
- * If I don't experience any improvement, how long after taking this medication should I call you?
- * Are there any foods, beverages or other medications I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- * Are there any alternatives to medication?

Whenever in doubt, call your physician, pharmacist or healthcare provider.



Sleep Disorders

Many people equate sleeping disorders to insomnia, or having trouble getting to or staying asleep. However, sleep disorders are varied and far-reaching. One division of sleep disorders is parasomnia, or undesired effects that come with sleep. This includes sleep walking, sleep eating, talking in sleep, or confused arousal, or when a person doesn't know where he or she is upon being awakened. Generally these disorders occur during the first third of sleep, or during the slow-wave cycle during sleep. Individuals who exhibit parasomnias may be aggressive during these times or engage in inappropriate behavior. They may say or do something that seems offensive. There is the potential of injury to the individual himself or a bed partner. Sleepwalking is a common parasomnia for children and generally resolves itself by the teen years. If a sleeping disorder is disrupting a person's life, he or she should speak with a doctor.