

Breast Cancer Fitness

Mercy / Wellness

Esther Walker, a physical therapy specialist at Mercy Wellness Center at 5008 Baltimore Avenue rhythmically counted for her willing survivors.

"Eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one," said the peppy Walker who was leading a group of breast cancer survivors participating in a free "Return to Wellness" program.

The program was organized by Wellness Community of Philadelphia for women who have completed breast cancer treatment within the past two years.

"Now count with me," directed the cheerful Walker as her group pumped iron with two-pound dumbbells. "That way I know you're breathing! And, keep your feet moving so that your heart rate won't go down."

The Wellness Community of Philadelphia (TWCP), based at the serene, shaded Ridgeland estate in West Fairmount Park, near the tennis courts, reaches out to patients with all kinds of cancer and their families.

While the majority of their support, education and recovery programs take place at that Susan Morgan Center at Ridgeland, TWCP also helps patients throughout Southeast Pennsylvania at satellite locations and local hospitals and community-based sites.

One such facility is the fitness unit on the second floor of the Mercy Wellness Center. In a bright, cheerful training room, seven women who are breast cancer survivors gather weekly for an hour of exercises and another hour of socialization under the caring and up-beat leadership of TWCP and Mercy Wellness professionals.

"They don't always realize the physical, emotional and social impact of their cancer therapy," indicated Barbara Davis, community based program director for TWCP. "Our structured fitness program helps build range of motion, strength and endurance over its six-week duration."

The socialization segment appears of equal importance.

"This time together helps them cope with the after effects of cancer," said Linda Keller

Doyle, regional fitness coordinator at the Mercy Center. "The guided discussions help get them over their ups and downs. They share concerns with women who have gone through what they have, and are experiencing the same side effects. They don't have to explain themselves," added Doyle. "Nor do they have to enter into sometimes detailed and painful discussions which are sometimes necessary even in the context of deeply loving families."

Being cancer survivors is not the only reason that this group is unique.

"One of the things that make this group special is its ethnic and racial mix, two African Americans, a Thai woman, two Caucasians and one lady from Nigeria," noted Davis.

Patients say they would urge other survivors to join and benefit from being a part of the group.

"I recommend the Center highly," said former breast cancer patient Michelle. "Our group members are all caregivers, and the program is helping me relieve my stress and fears."

The Wellness Community of Philadelphia, part of a national organization, has been dispensing "cancer support,

Breast Cancer Greater in Inner City

Men and women in inner city areas like Southwest Philadelphia experience a much more serious risk of mortality as compared with other segments of our population. Statistics collected by the American Cancer Society (Cancer Facts and Figures, 2007) indicated that the incidence of breast cancer in African-American women is only slightly higher than that of other ethnic groups, but the death rate is almost 50% higher than white women, and more than double that of other groups.

African-American males have an even more striking risk factor in every single cancer category. The rate of occurrence for prostate cancer for male residents of Southwest would again be about 50% above that of the general population. The prostate cancer death rate is almost 2 1/2 times over that of other ethnic groups.

While the reasons for those relationships may not be entirely clear, the important fact is that inner city residents should have regular testing for breast and uterine cancer in women, prostate cancer in men, and lung, colon and rectal cancer in both populations.

education and hope" for cancer sufferers, survivors and their families, for the past 15 years, according to its brochure.

Services unit on Haverford Avenue, and Tindley United Methodist Church, 750 South Broad St.

In addition to the Mercy Wellness Center on Baltimore Avenue and nearby Mercy Hospital at 501 South 54th St., educational and recovery sessions are also held at the convenient Health Annex in the Woodland Avenue Shopping Plaza at 61st Street and Woodland Avenue. Other locations include Hahnemann Hospital on North Broad Street, the Haddington Multi-

Persons wishing to learn more about TWCP support groups, educational workshops, networking opportunities and other programs can contact Barbara Davis by calling 215-879-7733 or by emailing her at bdavis@twcp.org. Newcomers are welcomed at orientation sessions twice-a-week, and reservations can be organized by contacting Davis.

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