

# Women's Health

## Women With Breast Cancer Join Together To Form Sisterhood

(NAPSA)—*Sisterhood* can mean many things—sharing dreams, achieving goals or counting on others. Little did the women in Bakersfield, Calif., know that something as shocking as a breast cancer diagnosis would bring strangers together into a sisterhood of support, friendship and hope for the future. Thanks to Nancy Pelton, who was first diagnosed in 1998, a new kind of support network was born to respond to the unique needs of women with HER2-positive breast cancer. HER2-positive breast cancer is considered an aggressive form of the disease that accounts for approximately 25 percent of all breast cancer cases, and is caused by an overexpression of a gene called HER2 in tumor cells.

While receiving her weekly treatments after a recurrence in 2001, Nancy, a self-described “talker,” would strike up conversations with other patients also receiving treatment at the infusion center. “In addition to talking to the nurses, meeting other women who were in the same situation really helped make my experience a more positive one,” said Pelton. But due to different treatment protocols, she rarely saw the same patient twice. Then one day, she sat next to another woman with breast cancer receiving the same weekly treatment. After talking and laughing together, Nancy asked if she’d like to schedule their next weekly treatment session at the same time and, from there, the HER2 Sisterhood was born. Since 2004, the group has continued to grow as more women with HER2-positive breast cancer heard about the Sisterhood.

The connection among the women grew as they met during their weekly infusions of a therapy for HER2-positive breast cancer called Herceptin. For Nancy and her Sisters, Herceptin has become part of their life and the bond that brought them together.

Many of the 22 members of the HER2 Sisterhood have met at the



**Talking to other women who also have the same type of breast cancer can be a good thing.**

infusion center on Wednesdays to receive treatment at the same time and, more importantly, to support one another. They talk about family, vacations and jobs, as well as share information about symptoms, treatments and living with cancer. They also provide encouragement and celebrate milestones, such as graduating from treatment after completing 52 weeks of therapy, the recommended length of adjuvant treatment with Herceptin.

“Cancer is a part of my life,” said Pelton, who has been receiving Herceptin weekly for five years and is currently in remission. “The HER2 Sisterhood also is a part of my life and it is nice to know that we can count on each other and support each other just like real sisters. The more support and education we have about HER2-positive breast cancer, the better advocates we are for our own health.”

Beyond their weekly treatments, the HER2 Sisterhood gathers for dinner every month, as well as raises awareness and funds for cancer initiatives in their community, like Relay for Life. A few of the Sisters even make themselves available to answer questions from newly diagnosed women at the center.

“The HER2 Sisterhood has become an important resource for my patients and allows them to share their experiences with other breast cancer patients,” said Dr. Ravi Patel, a founding doctor of the Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center in Bakersfield, a leading cancer facility in the West

Coast, where the Sisterhood started. “Because Herceptin therapy is recommended for a minimum of one year for adjuvant breast cancer treatment, the Sisterhood has been helpful in supporting them during their treatment cycle.”

Herceptin is the only FDA-approved therapy approved for early-stage adjuvant (node-positive) and advanced HER2-positive breast cancer. Herceptin first received FDA approval in 1998 for the treatment of advanced HER2-positive breast cancer, both as a first-line therapy in combination with chemotherapy (paclitaxel) and as a single agent in second- and third-line therapy. Last November, Herceptin was FDA approved as part of a standard adjuvant treatment regimen containing doxorubicin, cyclophosphamide and paclitaxel for HER2-positive node-positive breast cancer. Adjuvant therapy is given to women with early-stage, localized breast cancer who have had surgery and possibly radiation therapy with the goal of reducing the risk of cancer recurrence.

The most common side effects associated with Herceptin were fever, nausea, vomiting, infusion reactions, diarrhea, infections, increased cough, headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, rash, low white and red blood cells, and muscle pain. **Herceptin treatment can result in reduced heart function and congestive heart failure. Serious infusion reactions and lung problems have also been seen;** rarely, these have been fatal. The worsening of low white blood cell counts associated with chemotherapy has also occurred.

For more information about Herceptin or HER2-positive breast cancer, women should talk to their doctor or visit [www.Herceptin.com](http://www.Herceptin.com).

**For full prescribing information, including BOXED WARNINGS for Herceptin, please call (800) 821-8590 or visit [www.gene.com](http://www.gene.com).**