

Breast Cancer Survivors

Written by Forward Times Staff
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Breast Cancer Survivor Shares a Contagious Smile

Harris County Hospital District patient shares her story of survival.

HOUSTON – Josette Hubert remembers November 10, 2004. That's the day she was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer.

She had known there was a lump in her breast, but with no insurance, she ignored it. When it got painful, she went to the Emergency Department at Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, part of the Harris County Hospital District.

“The staff scheduled a brea

st clinic appointment for me the next day, so I knew something was wrong,” she says.

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In December, she started chemotherapy to reduce the size of the mass and had surgery in October 2005. More chemo and radiation therapy followed.

In December 2005, she started having headaches that she chalked up to sinus issues. Her doctor didn't. He asked her to return to LBJ Hospital immediately, and an MRI revealed a brain tumor.

She was transferred to Ben Taub General Hospital, part of the Harris County Hospital District, and scheduled for surgery the next day.

"That was best," she says, "I didn't have time to panic."

Josette continues to visit LBJ Hospital's Infusion Center for chemotherapy every three weeks.

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“I love the people there. They’re knowledgeable, consistent, gentle,” she says. “They make us feel important, like our care is important.”

Today, she’s quick to tell people that breast cancer is not a death sentence.

“You can survive. Do self-exams. Catch it early,” she says. “When you first feel a lump, see a doctor.”

After spending a few minutes with Josette, one imagines that a positive outlook can’t hurt either.

“I stay positive so my family won’t worry,” she says. “I try to smile because it helps me and it’s contagious. I always got up and put on make-up every day as if I was going somewhere. I didn’t want to look sick.”

Josette is often dressed in pink.

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“My sister and nieces buy things to remind me that I’m a survivor. If it has a pink ribbon on it, I probably own it,” she says. “I have my own support group. From my first visit with the oncologist when my sister took notes for me, to daily calls from my mother, I have felt my family’s prayers and care.”

The Harris County Hospital District (hchdonline.com) is the community-owned healthcare system for the nation’s third most-populous county, and offers inpatient and outpatient healthcare in more than 40 locations. Harris County Hospital District has been named among the Best Hospitals in the region by U.S. News & World Report and is the recipient of the prestigious National Committee for Quality Assurance designation for its network of patient-centered medical homes. The hospital district is staffed by faculty and residents from nationally ranked medical schools, Baylor College of Medicine and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth)



Breast Cancer Survivor Treasures The Gifts of Life

Harris County Hospital District patient shares her story of survival.

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-HOUSTON – Dr. Margo Hilliard Alford is senior vice president of Community Health and Wellness for the Harris County Hospital District. In that role, she advocates for patients every day of the week.

When Dr. Hilliard had her mammogram in 2009, she didn't question the results. They were abnormal, though there was no significant change from the year before.

"I was just happy to have it over," she remembers.

A month later, her doctor asked her to have a repeat exam. At the time, she didn't know why – perhaps a routine review in the doctor's office. She now knows that she's fortunate to have received the call.

The second mammogram revealed a low-grade, slow-growing tumor. She had a lumpectomy and began 33 weeks of radiation therapy.

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In 2010, doctors discovered evidence of more extensive disease in her follow-up mammogram. She had a mastectomy and recovered.

Dr. Hilliard discusses the lessons she learned from her experience.

“I should have had questions for the doctors – advocated for myself – after that first mammogram,” she reflects. “It can be done in a non-aggressive way. I do it for my family. I do it for our patients. It’s important to understand doctors’ decisions.

“This has reinforced my interest in an effective mechanism for reaching out to people. The Harris County Hospital District does so much education. We advocate for patients. We help uninsured patients get access to the system. We operate a very successful mammogram program.

“I’ve always advised my relatives and the public to get information from doctors in writing, to have preventive screenings, to stay up-to-date with exams. Make sure you understand and ask questions. This doesn’t offend physicians. It’s better to ask, than not to ask.

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“All of us are given life. None of us know when it will end. It’s important to take every opportunity to maintain and improve our health. We must be actively engaged in it, and monitor and treasure the gifts of life and health.”

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