



Living through cancer with exercise

Sunflower Wellness empowers people living with cancer to find strength and support through exercise.

### Board of Directors

|                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Bill Bain, President     | Regan Fedric        |
| Carrie Bonnet, Treasurer | Bunny Rust          |
| Trisha Hue, Secretary    | Kris Morrison       |
| Anne Stackhouse          | Chris Dunn          |
|                          | Cecelia Ottenweller |

## November - December 2013

### *Dr. Leah Kelley Explains Why She Now Writes Exercise Prescriptions for All Her Cancer Patients*

*"Exercise is the perfect antidote to the sometimes difficult physical challenges that people dealing with cancer experience, and it often leads them to a more active, healthy lifestyle long after treatment is over."*



Dr. Leah Kelley is a Bay Area breast surgeon with a practice at Marin General Hospital, where she is the medical director of the breast oncology program. Her practice is exclusively focused on breast disease,

including breast cancer. She is closely affiliated with the Marin Cancer Institute's Center for Integrative Health and Wellness, a multispecialty center for wellness in oncology.

Dr. Kelley has become a strong advocate of the powers of exercise for her patients. "Hard numbers from several recent studies indicate that regular exercise decreases the chance of cancer recurrence," she says, "and anecdotally, based on reports from my patients, I believe exercise improves both patient experience and patient outcomes."

Regan Fedric, Sunflower Wellness co-founder and Program Director, is also affiliated with the Center, which is where the two met. Through her interactions with Regan, Dr. Kelley realized that Sunflower was a great way to connect her patients

to the benefits of exercise through an organization that fully appreciated the special needs of people dealing with cancer. She now writes a Sunflower Wellness exercise prescription for all of her patients fighting cancer.

"Regan's consults are critical in helping my patients feel empowered to move actively toward a healthier lifestyle," says Dr. Kelley. "Many people know they should exercise, but not how to exercise safely and effectively, especially as they go through treatment. Regan and the Sunflower Wellness staff do an amazing job of providing the tools and environment that make exercise accessible, welcoming and fun."

Having been an enthusiastic athlete most of her life, Dr. Kelley practices what she preaches. She has also been passionate about medicine since she was very young, knowing that she'd become a physician someday. Her mother was a great advocate and supported her in pursuing her dreams. She began her career with a focus on obstetrics and gynecology, but became fascinated with the mechanics of surgery and changed direction. She did her residency at UC San Francisco and completed a breast surgery fellowship at University of Southern California in Los Angeles. *(Article continues on Page 2)*

#### **Also in this issue:**

- *Cancer and Sex: "Wink, wink, nudge, nudge..."*
- *Research News: Yoga's benefits*
- *Exercise of the month: Torso-rotation, with band*

Now you can



find us on facebook

***(Dr. Leah Kelley, cont. from page 1)***

What has never changed is her passionate advocacy for women's health, and for Leah, "health" includes much more than just the physical expression of disease. From the first appointment forward, her patients are made aware that everything about their daily lives can affect disease outcomes. Initial consults address all areas including diet, mental and emotional health, exercise and daily habits.

The Center appears to be a perfect fit for a doctor like Leah Kelley. Just as its name suggests, the institution treats the whole cancer patient through an integrated approach that includes acupuncture, nutrition, meditation, and exercise as well as other available therapeutic practices.

Sunflower Wellness continues to seek out partnerships with leading medical professionals like Dr. Leah Kelley, who support their patients in becoming empowered in their fight against cancer, which ultimately improves their lives.

***"Sex... wink, wink, nudge, nudge, know what I mean, know what I mean??"***

*By Cecelia Ottenweller*

Hide the kiddies, close the blinds... Folks, let's talk about sex.

It's time to get this subject out into the open. Sex matters. Sex is good. Sex is a part of being alive and human. Sex is important.

But how many of us who deal with cancer talk about our sex lives with our treatment team?

I joined a cancer support group when I was first diagnosed. The members of the group had been meeting for a while – I was a newbie, a young breast cancer patient. The group was for patients and their caregivers, so my husband went with me. We were at different stages of our disease, both males and females, young and old.

"This group is for you. No subjects are taboo," the therapist said. So, I took her at her word.

It had been bothering me for a while, but I'd not mentioned it to anyone... "This is so hard," I said. "I don't feel attractive, I feel ugly. I don't have a sex drive, sex hurts... I'm afraid no one will ever find me beautiful again."

The group was silent for a moment. The therapist looked at me, confused. "I'm not sure why you're bringing that up. We have more serious things to discuss." I didn't say anything, but inside, I disagreed.

I brought it up to my oncologist after my second diagnosis. "Well, I think you should be happy to be alive," she said as she continued her exam, and that was that.

I no longer belong to that support group and I fired the oncologist (for a variety of reasons, but insensitivity was certainly a factor).

My cancer was hormone positive, which means my therapy is aimed at limiting the availability of estrogen in my body. Estrogen feeds my tumor. Estrogen also keeps my sex organs – including my brain – functioning. Not having estrogen... well, let's just say the choice between a good book and a few rounds of slap and tickle with my sweetheart usually has me turning pages rather than turning down the sheets.

The change came on when I wasn't looking – sex wasn't on my mind while I was sick from chemo and once I went through massive surgeries to discard parts or move them around, I didn't feel like being touched much. My drive drove off and didn't send a postcard.

Fortunately, doctors are waking up to how sex affects intimacy for patients. Sex therapists specializing in cancer are getting the word out – reviving sexual intimacy is possible! A search on cancer forums on the net also shows a lively discussion on the subject and people are taking their sexual health in their own hands (sorry, couldn't resist) and are exploring how different toys and lubricants increase physical response. For patients like me, doctors are looking at how

minute amounts of estrogen delivered vaginally can help with dryness and elasticity! YES!

And don't forget – EXERCISE HELPS. It gets the vital parts moving, it wakes the body up, it releases endorphins that lift mood and increase a general sense of being alive. When I exercise, I feel more positive about who I am. Exercise is an important step in the right direction.

But this stuff isn't easy. Are you fighting cancer? Be honest about what you are going through and what you need. Try new things, don't be embarrassed about pursuing anything you need to rebuild this part of your life. If it takes going to Erotic Cabaret and venturing into that dark, hidden nook in the back corner, then do it. I'll certainly not think less of you for it.

Do you love someone fighting cancer? Let them talk about their sex life. Ask them. Invite the conversation. And then listen, let them have their say. And if you're the spouse or significant other, take your good sweet time to help rebuild intimacy. Explore new erogenous zones... toes are delightful, that sweet spot behind the knee is a joy. Who knows, you both may discover territory that leads to greater intimacy and enjoyment than you've ever had before.

What it comes down to is acknowledging that sex and sexuality are important and vital to survival in any way we can get it. Don't let little things like embarrassment or shame stop such a grand and beautiful adventure such as life.

### **Research News:**

#### **Yoga's Benefits**

Cancer patients often report feeling abandoned and isolated following cessation of active treatment, which may increase symptoms, such as depression and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> One in three cancer patients use complementary and alternative medicine techniques, such as yoga, to help manage their symptoms.<sup>2-4</sup> Yoga is a type of 'mind-body' exercise that combines physical poses with breathing techniques and relaxation or

meditation.<sup>5</sup> Researchers recently performed a review of 13 clinical trials of yoga in cancer patients and found that yoga has large beneficial effects on symptoms of distress, anxiety, and depression. Yoga also helped reduce fatigue and improved general quality of life in the cancer patients.<sup>6</sup>



*References: <sup>1</sup>Monti D, Sufian D, Peterson C. Potential role of mind-body therapies in cancer survivorship. American Cancer Society. 2008;112(11):2607–2616. <sup>2</sup>Ernst E, Cassileth BR. The prevalence of complementary/alternative medicine in cancer: a systematic review. Cancer 1998;83:777–782.; <sup>3</sup>Bernstein BJ, Grasso T. Prevalence of complementary and alternative medicine use in cancer patients. Oncology (Williston Park) 2001;15:1267–1272.; <sup>4</sup>Molassiotis A, Fernandez-Ortega P, et al. Use of complementary and alternative medicine in cancer patients: a European survey. Ann Oncol 2005, 16:655–663.; <sup>5</sup>Lipton L. Using yoga to treat disease: an evidence-based review. JAAPA 2008; 21:34–36,38, 41.; <sup>6</sup>Buffart LM, van Uffelen JG, Riphagen II, et al. Physical and psychosocial benefits of yoga in cancer patients and survivors, a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. BMC Cancer. 2012;12:559.*

## **Sunflower Wellness, by the numbers**

### **UCSF Exercise Consultation stats**

- Program start: April 15, 2010
- Over 940 patient phone inquiries logged
- Over 680 patient consultation sessions held
- Patients who report they now exercise: 77.6%
- Average STRESS impact: 26.7% reduction
- Average FATIGUE impact: 27.1% reduction

### **Stanford Exercise Consultation stats**

- Program start: January 15, 2013
- Over 50 patient consultation sessions held

### **Sunflower Exercise program stats**

- Weekly exercise classes currently offered: 15
- Total clients served: 416
- Class sessions logged: 2,050
- Personal training sessions: 485
- Total client- hours of exercise: Over 10,200

## *Exercise of the Month: Alternating back-step with torso rotation, from our online VIDEO LIBRARY*



1. Tie a resistance band securely to a solid, fixed object, or close it off in a doorway.
2. (Figure 1) Step back until the resistance band has no slack, facing straight ahead, holding the handle with both hands, arms extended with elbows slightly relaxed.
3. (Fig. 2) Leave your left foot planted, facing forward, as you pivot toward your right and take a full step backward with your right foot, pivoting your upper body to the right as you go (Fig. 3).
4. (Fig. 4) Return to center, then reverse the movement by keeping your right foot planted (Fig. 5) as you turn toward your left, step your left foot back, and pivot your upper body to the left (Fig. 6).
5. As you pivot, pull on the band with both hands in the direction of your turn (Figs. 3 and 6).
6. Repeat this exercise up to a specific count (12 - 15 repetitions on each side), or time yourself and do the exercise for 60 to 90 seconds.

### ***Welcome, Kim Kouri!***



Sunflower Wellness is extremely pleased to welcome Kim Kouri to our growing family. Kim joined us in October 2013 in a part-time role as our Director of Development.

Kim has been busy for several years as Development Director for Educational Tall Ship, an organization working with thousands of local students and teaching them skills while they build a sailboat.

Kim is also a mom, a breast cancer survivor, and dedicated to exercise. In fact, Kim has started teaching a weekly strength and balance group exercise class at our most recent health club, Rolling Hills Club in Novato, CA. As Kim has become fond of saying: "Avoid inactivity!" We couldn't agree more.

And, fair warning: she'll be in touch with you soon! Kim is passionate about our work at Sunflower Wellness, and she's a very persuasive fundraiser.

*Please help us continue our great work by making a donation today!*

### ***In Brief***

- Join us in welcoming **Cecelia Ottenweller** to the Sunflower Wellness Board. Cecelia's articles have graced our newsletters for a few years now (including one on sex and cancer in this issue). Welcome, Cecelia!
- Big thanks to the **INTERMIX** store at the Marin Country Mart in Larkspur for arranging a shopping day to benefit Sunflower Wellness on October 17. Thank you also to hosts **Anh Sundstrom** of 9 to 5 Chic, **Stacy Achuck** and Sunflower Treasurer **Carrie Bonnet!**
- Thank you, **San Marin High School!** Their enterprising students devoted their Powder Puff Football game on October 26 as a fundraiser for Sunflower. Go Mustangs!
- Check out our new Northern Marin classes at **Rolling Hills Club**. They now offer Sunflower classes including a Strength & Conditioning class on Mondays and an AquaFit class on Thursdays. As participation at Rolling Hills grows, we'll be adding more classes! For information on the Rolling Hills program, please visit our website and look for "Find classes."

