Beyond breast cancer: the gift of life

Last summer Zhanna Bronshvayg, RN, was invited to join a team from the Dana Farber Cancer Institute to conduct a three-day breast cancer symposium in Irkustk, Siberia. Bronshvayg, a native of Russia who has worked at the Lynn Community Health Center since 1992, provided the clinical expertise to the faculty. LCHC Board member Magnolia Contreras, who is the Director of Community Benefits at Dana Farber, helped pull together the team and organize the trip.

The goal of the symposium was to educate the medical community in Irkutsk about the latest standards of care to treat breast cancer and to increase community awareness and education about survivorship and community support. “I immediately thought of Zhanna when building the team for this project. I believe that she runs one of the most comprehensive mammography clinics at a health center. Her expertise in early detection and her ability to communicate in her native language added depth to our faculty,” said Magnolia Contreras.

In Russia, more than 40% of breast cancer patients are diagnosed in advanced stages of the disease, compared with only five percent in the United States. “There are many reasons for this,” said Bronshvayg. Although health care is free in Russia, mammography centers are scarce and cancer care is often far away. There is also a cultural reluctance to talk about women’s bodies. This last issue is one which the symposium attempted to challenge by establishing a breast cancer awareness group that will provide ongoing education to women about the disease.

“Our goal was to bring a message of hope to women in Russia, for whom breast cancer is still a largely fatal disease,” said Bronshvayg. “Many women prefer not to know if there is a problem because they are afraid there is nothing they can do about it.”

“IT is a challenge in Russia,” said Yelena Wetherill, Ph.D., fellow team member from the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and also a native of Russia. “In our language there is no word for cancer survivor. The closest translation refers to someone who has lived through a war.” Team member Martha Hayward, a breast cancer survivor and member of Dana Farber’s Adult Patient and Family Advisory Council, has created Remember Beads™: a string of four pearls of different proportions that she created to represent the size of tumors at various detection stages (see photo above). She, along with six of her friends, made kits with hand-drawn instructions so that the people attending the conference in Siberia could make their own bead necklaces to raise awareness in their communities.

During the symposium, 45 women joined together to make the beads. “It was a wonderful experience,” said Bronshvayg. “They were very shy about this subject at first, but as we worked they opened up and became passionate about talking about breast cancer. They are committed to breaking down cultural barriers and helping women take control of their health and their lives.”
Dominican MD serving her community in Lynn

Dr. Laura Russo Herrera has travelled far from her home in the Dominican Republic, but is still serving her community.

“| knew in high school that medicine was my future!  I loved the sciences, especially biology.” As the first medical doctor in her family, Dr. Russo studied at the Universidad Nacional Pedro Henriquez Urena in the Dominican Republic, and then at Mount Sinai Medical Center and Lutheran Medical Center in New York. As she was completing her residency, she began to look for a community to serve, and found a great fit in Lynn.

“Lynn is perfect for me because I wanted to serve my Dominican community, and that community here is very large and vibrant,” she says. “It is wonderful for patients to have a doctor who speaks their language—both literally and from a cultural perspective.”

Dr. Russo loves working at the Health Center’s West Lynn practice at 694 Western Avenue. “It is the best of everything,” she says. “It has all the resources of the Lynn Community Health Center at its fingertips, but maintains the feel of a small practice. I can really get to know my patients here.”

Her practice in Lynn has grown in the few months she has been here, attracting people from many different cultures and backgrounds, but particularly those who speak Spanish. Dr. Russo feels that her ability to communicate with people in their native language makes a tangible difference when it comes to promoting health and prevention. “I believe that people take better care of themselves when they can speak directly to their doctor rather than through a nurse or an interpreter. I am someone they can trust.”

Dr. Russo has interests and experience in treating infectious disease, cardiology, endocrinology, but the focus of her practice is health promotion and preventive medicine. “I like to help people understand how they can stay healthy” she said. “That is what I love about primary care.”

LCHC Celebrates World Diabetes Day

On November 14, the Lynn Community Health Center celebrated World Diabetes Day an event that included patient education workshops, health screenings, a healthy meal, and salsa dancing.

The event was organized by LCHC’s “Total Life Care (TLC)” team. The TLC program, led by Susan Wheeler, RN (right), provides outreach and education to patients with high-risk or out of control diabetes. The program is currently focusing on the Latino community, which is developing diabetes at twice the rate of the general population. “We focus on patients’ problem solving skills with the goal of giving them the tools they need to manage the disease,” said Wheeler.
Annual Baby’s 1st Christmas party brings smiles to all!

Despite an impending snow storm, over 60 families turned out on December 19th for “Baby’s First Christmas,” an annual celebration for the Health Center’s youngest patients.

“Baby’s First Christmas” is a party with a purpose. For over 10 years families and providers have come together to share a meal, and gifts are given to babies, their siblings, and their parents. Each mother gets to take home a picture of her child with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Parents also have a chance to win donated door prizes like strollers, booster seats, clothing, and blankets.

The event was created and is run by the dedicated staff of the OB/GYN department and committed volunteers. It is a chance for patients to reconnect with the doctors, nurses and staff who cared for them during their pregnancies, and for the staff to check in on how the moms and babies are doing.

All gifts are donated, as is much of the food. Staff and volunteers raise money for what it costs to do the rest. “Everyone gets involved,” said Leanne Santerre, nurse supervisor for the OB/GYN department. “The amount of goodwill toward our families makes this event so special for them. We are so grateful for the support of our community.”

In 2008, the Lynn Community Health Center’s Ob/Gyn department was responsible for delivering 524 babies. “Baby’s First” is one way for parents stay connected to their providers, and see the Health Center as a resource for building healthy lives.
This spring the Health Center will celebrate the grand opening of **LCHC Eye Care Services**, established in partnership with the New England Eye Institute and the New England College of Optometry. The new practice will be located two blocks away from the main site, at 23 Central Avenue.

Dr. Joyce Chien will be the Director of the new service. Dr. Chien completed her Residency in Primary Care Optometry at the State University of New York, College of Optometry in 2003. She has over 5 years of clinical and teaching experience. In addition to providing patient care, she will be a faculty member at the New England College of Optometry and will be supervising clinical students who will be assisting her in her practice. The team will be joined by an ophthalmologist who will be on site two days a month.

LCHC Eye Care Services will provide comprehensive eye care, including routine eye exams, eye glasses dispensing, retinal screening and testing for glaucoma.

Look for more information about our grand opening this spring.