

**UC DAVIS**  
COMPREHENSIVE  
CANCER CENTER



WeCARE!

Community-Based  
Breast Cancer Peer  
Navigator Program

# History of the WeCARE! Breast Cancer Peer Navigator Program

**W**hen Susan Grenda learned she had breast cancer four years ago, the diagnosis left her overwhelmed by a maelstrom of emotions.

There was disbelief.

There was confusion.

There was frustration.

There was sadness.

And, more than anything, there was fear—fear of the malignancy inside her, fear of surgery, fear of complications, fear of the effects on her loved ones, fear of the unknown.

Grenda's experience was by no means unique. Newly-diagnosed cancer patients invariably confront an onslaught of worries and questions as they cope with the news. Those with breast cancer also face additional concerns about body image, relationships and treatment choices.

A unique program at the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center aims to make the first few months after diagnosis easier for women.

Known as the WeCARE! Community-Based Breast Cancer Peer Navigator Program, the program matches trained breast-cancer survivors with newly diagnosed women for up to six months for one-on-one support. It is made possible through an annual \$128,000 grant from the Safeway Foundation.

*"For some newly diagnosed patients, the idea of waiting a couple weeks for that first appointment can feel like forever. It's like this alien monster inside of you, and you want it out now."*

— MARLENE VON FRIEDERICH-FITZWATER

Safeway considers breast cancer one of the most significant women's health issues. The company's Breast Cancer Research and Awareness campaign raises more than \$19 million annually from customers and employees for breast-cancer research, prevention and early detection programs during October, breast cancer awareness month.

"We are committed to working together with our employees, customers and supplier partners to help find a cure for breast cancer," says Karl Schroeder, president of Safeway Northern California Division. "But while we focus on the research, we see an opportunity to benefit from the lessons and experiences of survivors. Their

success can be passed on and shared with others.

We are pleased to partner with the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center and believe this program will go a long way in helping newly-diagnosed women ultimately reach the road to recovery."

The first team of peer navigators, also known as "cancer coaches," started in January 2009. Among the class of 14 recruits was Grenda, a Roseville mother of two.

"I think for most people who have not been through it, a cancer diagnosis just feels like a death sentence," says Grenda. "This program is an awesome idea because it not only gives new patients a resource, but also introduces them to vibrant, positive women who have come through treatment and continue to live fulfilling lives. That is huge."

Marlene von Friederichs-Fitzwater, Ph.D., MPH, the program's founder, could not agree more. She is an assistant professor with the UC Davis School of Medicine as well as director of the Comprehensive Cancer Center's Outreach Research and Education Program. She is also a cancer survivor.

Recalling her own experience at the time of diagnosis, von Friederichs-Fitzwater says new patients often feel helpless, bewildered and alone — even if they have supportive family and friends. "The idea behind our program is that having an experienced, trained cancer survivor at your side can make a world of difference as you travel this path," von Friederichs-Fitzwater says. "We don't want anyone to have to make that journey alone."

## A region-wide scope

More than 1,400 new breast cancer cases are expected in the four-county Sacramento region, according to estimates from the American Cancer Society and the California Cancer Registry. Not wanting to reserve the benefit of peer navigation exclusively for patients at UC Davis, von Friederichs-Fitzwater took pains to give the program a wide scope.

Toward that end, the WeCARE! Program is offered free to any cancer center or clinic. The program continues to grow throughout the North State as additional sites add WeCARE! to their patient and survivor services. All training, materials and support for other sites is free. A state-wide conference will be held in 2013 to bring all the peer navigators and site project coordinators together for additional learning and sharing. Tahoe Forest Cancer Center in Truckee and Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center in Marysville, part of the UC Davis Cancer Care Network, came on board in 2010 and Feather River Cancer Center in Paradise begins its WeCARE! Cancer Peer Navigator Program with training on Sunday, July 1. All three partnering sites include all cancer types.



## ARE YOU ELIGIBLE? How to become a peer navigator...

Any breast cancer survivor who completed treatment at least two years ago, has good interpersonal communication skills, is available to complete the necessary training and work with a breast-cancer patient for up to six months is eligible to become a peer navigator. The initial day-long training session covers basic information, with additional advanced trainings available throughout the year.

Being a successful navigator or "cancer coach," however, takes more. The core of the WeCARE! training program—COPE—stands for Creativity, Optimism, Planning and Expert information. It is set of interaction tools all navigators are expected to learn and use in coaching and empowering newly-diagnosed patients. It is the difference between being a good friend and being a good navigator.

"Navigating is more than being someone's buddy," said program founder and director Marlene M. von Friederichs-

Fitzwater. "It's an orderly process with the specific goals of helping someone work through obstacles and improve their problem-solving and coping skills."

Besides understanding and using COPE, Friederichs-Fitzwater said the best navigators are those who were strongly proactive during their own treatment. They also tend to come from one of two camps—those who had a lot of support and want others to as well, and those who had no support and want to make sure no one else goes through the same experience.

"Most of all, it's very important to be a good listener," she adds. "The training will give navigators everything else it takes to provide special support to a cancer patient."

Those interested in becoming a peer navigator can begin the process by contacting Patti Robinson at (916) 734-0823 or [patricia.robinson@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu](mailto:patricia.robinson@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu) to learn about the nearest program.

# The real experts

## Peer navigators prepared to guide patients through treatment at Feather River Cancer Center

**W**hen asked about the benefits the WeCARE! Cancer Peer Navigator program will bring to Feather River Hospital, Cancer Center Director Kate McDonald immediately recalled an incident from earlier in her nursing career.

"I was working as an oncology nurse, treating a 30-year-old patient with breast cancer," she began. "We'd educated her about the loss of hair from treatment and she was expecting it, but not really, I don't think you can ever really be fully prepared for that."

While the program was initially designed for patients with breast cancer, the local program will serve those with other types of cancer as well.

"She continued working throughout her treatment, and she called one morning and said, 'I've lost my hair and I don't know how to tie a scarf, and I have to go to work.' I've never lost my hair, I've never worn a scarf. A bunch of us nurses were trying to figure it out while she was on the phone, but none of us were very good at it."

McDonald felt it was a perfect example of when a cancer peer navigator could prove invaluable. "They can help because they've gone through that journey. If someone loses their hair, or needs a resource they might not be aware of, then peer

navigators can help, because they're the real experts."

McDonald said Feather River's Cancer Center provides comprehensive care on par with much larger facilities, and the Peer Navigator program addresses the sole component they thought was missing. In addition to medical services, the Cancer Center also offers art therapy, creative writing courses, yoga and many more programs available free of charge. McDonald noted that people won't have to be a patient at Feather River to participate in the WeCARE! Cancer Peer Navigator program, which will begin July 1.

Thus far, Feather River has recruited 15 survivors to be peer navigators, 14 women and one man. The volunteers range from in their early 30s to retirement age. While the program was initially designed for patients with breast cancer, the local program will serve those with other types of cancer as well. The navigators include those who've been treated for lymphoma, lung, prostate and breast cancer.

Feather River Hospital Peer Navigator Coordinator Elise Hale said that, as varied as the navigator's backgrounds are, they all have one thing in common.

"They all really want to support someone else," she said. "They reflect back on their first days of being diagnosed and how overwhelming it can be, with lots of information coming at you from different directions."

"They know it's important to have someone there to help process everything, or to just have a shoulder to lean on or cry on. All of them have expressed that one way or another."



Kate McDonald,  
Director of the  
Feather River  
Cancer Center.



MARGARET  
BROWN

## A COMPANION IN THE DARK Breast cancer survivor Margaret Brown eager to help patients at Feather River Cancer Center

**A**s a breast cancer survivor, Margaret Brown knows just how valuable it can be to have a companion on the dark journey through diagnosis and treatment.

"It took about a month for my diagnosis to sink in," said Brown, a retired Butte College English professor and assistant dean. "But when it did, I was really in the depths for several months. I was angry, anxious, scared and nervous. I had a lot of questions and felt very much alone."

"My husband was wonderful, but we were both in the same boat, having never experienced this before."

Things started turning around for Brown, she said, when she was contacted by a Chico woman named Wendy Azevedo. "I'm not really sure how she caught up with me, but she emailed me at some point, and I'm very glad she did. She's helped me and many other women and is a real champion for the cause of breast cancer locally."

Brown said Azevedo's influence was part of her inspiration for becoming a Peer Navigator.

"I went through treatment and came out the other side, and thankfully became a survivor," Brown said. "I've been cancer-free, active and healthy since 2010, and I decided I would do what I could to give back, to help someone the way she had helped me."

"I immediately contacted UC Davis and signed up for the program"

— MARGARET BROWN

Azevedo helps women of her own volition and is not affiliated with a program. Brown began doing the same—helping women on an unofficial, unaffiliated basis—all the while looking for a program like WeCARE! She couldn't find a service in which survivors help counsel the newly-diagnosed until a friend tipped her off to a newspaper insert about WeCARE!

"I immediately contacted UC Davis and signed up for the program," Brown said. When she independently attended Peer Navigator training in Sacramento, she was the only woman from Butte County. Now that Feather River Hospital has found and adopted the program, she will be joined by more than a dozen survivors acting as guides.

Brown explained that Navigators will contact newly-diagnosed patients who want to participate in the program by phone and set up a face-to-face meeting. Then, Navigators accompany them on their journey through treatment, helping them make sense of their options, expose them to resources and give unique input on their situation.

"We in no way give medical advice, but focus on more person-to-person practical information, like what to do if you get mouth sores, or how to talk to your children and that kind of thing."

"I'm so grateful and thankful that Feather River Hospital began participating in the program," Brown said. "They understood the need for this here and have really done great by bringing it to the area."

# Cutting-edge treatment, reinforced

## WeCARE! program adds to multi-faceted approach to cancer treatment at Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center



Lorna Yatman,  
RN, MSN, OCN

For physicians at Fremont-Rideout Health Group in Marysville, the WeCARE! Cancer Peer Navigator Program is yet another innovative angle from which to approach cancer treatment. For newly-diagnosed cancer patients at the Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center, the program is a source of hope and comfort during a turbulent, frightening time in their lives.

Since opening in September 2000, Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center has strived to provide a patient-friendly approach to treatment. The WeCARE! program fully embodies that mission by pairing current breast cancer patients with women who have survived treatment—survivors who know what it's like to battle serious illness and win, which emotions a patient will experience and which resources are available.

The program is a source of hope and comfort during a turbulent, frightening time in their lives.

Lorna Yatman, RN, MSN, OCN, credits the relationship between Fremont-Rideout Health Group and UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center for aiding in the center's multi-faceted approach. The WeCARE! program is just one of

many programs and treatments employed by the center, which offers a broad range of hematology, oncology and radiation therapy provided by fellowship-trained physicians and oncology-certified nurses. The center has expanded dramatically since 2000, when Fremont-Rideout physicians saw 20 to 30 patients a day. Now, the center is considered a premier cancer-treatment facility with a cutting-edge approach, serving nearly 30,000 patients a year.

The WeCARE! program comes into the fold amidst continued expansion—the center will add 21,135 square feet of new space to include 12 transfusion bays (where patients receive chemotherapy), six exam rooms, one linear accelerator and one ultrasound machine. Additional physicians will be drawn from the nearby UC Davis Health System to accommodate the expanded capabilities of the facility.

“Our community is very fortunate to have this here,” Yatman said of the expanding center. “People used to have to make a trip out of the area to receive their treatments. So, this is really all about the patients and making things convenient for them. This is a great place that is expanding to meet the needs of people in the North State.”

Just how dedicated is the Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center to serving the people? Here's a good example—the WeCARE! program is available to any newly-diagnosed cancer patients regardless of where they plan to receive their treatments. And for those facing the challenge of a lifetime, such acts of kindness can go a long way.

## Easing the burden

### Navigator helps Martha Reyes heal through Fremont-Rideout

Newly-diagnosed cancer patients can feel as if a specter of fear is looming over the road to recovery, an oppressive weight burdening their everyday life. But for breast cancer patients of Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center in Marysville, that burden has been eased thanks to the innovative approach of the WeCARE! Breast Cancer Peer Navigator Program.

Meet Martha Reyes, a loving wife, mother, and grandmother who migrated from Mexico City to Dobbins about 30 years ago to raise her family. Now, in her second week of chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer at Fremont-Rideout, she doesn't hesitate to share her friendly smile, her bald head and the hope she has found through the guidance and support offered by her Peer Navigator, Janice Ray. The two sit side-by-side as the chemo shot Reyes just received begins to take its toll.

“When I was first told I had cancer, I wanted to laugh,” Martha said. “My mother and my father's families did not have cancer, so I am the first. But, I'm in God's hands. Some people might say, why me? I say, why not?”

“Martha is very spiritual and I think that helps her,” added Janice in support. “She travels 45 minutes with her family for these treatments. I live nearby and I had a hard time [with chemotherapy].”

When questioned as to how Janice has helped her through the process, Martha said, “It's wonderful to have someone who understands you. It's easier when

you have someone who has been there explain things in detail. I can ask her about things, like why my fingernails are turning black, and she tells me why. She also helps me to understand what to expect.”

“It's wonderful to have someone who understands you.”

— MARTHA REYES

Much like Martha, Ray is an immigrant—in her case, from England—who found her way to the North State and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008. She underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments with Fremont-Rideout before they instituted the WeCARE! program.

After successful treatment, she decided to become a navigator in order to share her experience and convey a message of hope. She was selected to be Martha's navigator based on gender, type of cancer being treated, medicines used and even the fact that they are both from countries outside the U.S. The two often share a laugh, and it is clear Martha's ongoing treatment is bringing them closer together.



Janice Ray and Martha Reyes