

Your Breast Cancer Treatment Handbook: Your Guide to Understanding the Disease, Treatments, Emotions and Recovery From Breast Cancer

By Judy C Kneece, RN, OCN

Review by Carol Redding

“**H**andbook” is an appropriate description of this concise, practical work, which is clearly and sensitively written. Ms Kneece combines her credentials—registered nurse, certified oncology nurse, MammaCare[®] Specialist, and trainee at the Mind and Body Institute of Harvard Medical School—with an empathetic understanding of her patients’ needs. This combination offers readers a high level of psychological and emotional comfort with this handbook—both as a resource and as a starting point for building a better understanding of what it is like to have breast cancer.

The practical nature of the book is invaluable in its simple, thorough explanation of different types of breast cancer, the role of the lymphatic system, surgical and reconstructive procedures, and general medical terminology likely to be encountered by patients with breast cancer. In short, the author provides patients with the tools they need to become well-informed, fully participative members of the health care team. At the same time, the author spares the reader the research efforts that would be required if such a handbook were not readily available.

Kneece also addresses the needs of a patient’s family and friends and offers brief, sound advice on how to convey information, what sort of reactions to expect, and how to prepare for them. Of particular use is her advice on how to talk with children about breast cancer: This advice prepares patients for the possibility that their children may express anger or fear or may believe that they somehow caused the disease.¹ As part of her overall experience of having breast cancer, every mother with this disease must be prepared to face these issues. The author also helps patients understand the importance of including children in the care experience and guides patients on how to do this in a way appropriate for each child’s age.

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Kneece reminds the patient—whose normal reaction to the diagnosis might be self-absorption, distress, and withdrawal—that her mate is also suffering because of the breast cancer diagnosis. The author speaks frankly about effective steps that a couple can take to maximize communication and sensuality, thereby using their shared experience of breast cancer to strengthen their relationship instead of being driven apart.

The visual layout of this book is especially helpful. A combination of tables, charts, bulleted lists, and clearly illustrated images is used to clarify concepts, surgical procedures, cellular structures, metastatic pathways, postoperative exercises, and techniques for breast self-examination. The book includes a set of tear-out pages

useful to patients for maintaining records of medical contacts, treatment records, bulb drain records, and sets of predefined questions for the health care teams with whom patients are likely to interact.

Your Breast Cancer Treatment Handbook is an affordable, comprehensive resource for any family coping with a breast cancer diagnosis and its aftermath. The book is an equally appropriate and meaningful gift to give to a friend or family member during any stage of breast cancer treatment or recovery.

If this publication has any drawback, it is its cover design—ironically, one aspect of the book that could encourage many women to pick it up for a closer look. Its depiction of a delicate pink rose accompanied by gold-embossed script will probably make the book visually appealing to most women but might cause some men to overlook it as merely “girls’ stuff” or “feminine fluff.” Physicians and other health care practitioners who interact with the male partners of women with breast cancer should encourage these men to read this book cover to cover, because the content is as much for them as for the women they hold dear.



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Carol Redding, a writer, is also an Information Technology Consultant and Customer Service Manager at San Diego State University; a California-licensed Private Investigator; a grant writer for the California Institutes of Preventive Medicine; an authentic voice in the National Call to Action, a movement to end child abuse and neglect; a Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine; a cancer survivor; and a patient who recently embarked on her own breast cancer journey.

Another reason for men to read this book applies to them even more directly: The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2003, about 1300 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed among men in the United States. Breast cancer is about 100 times more common among women,² but we would be doing men a grave injustice by ignoring the possibility that they, too, may someday be diagnosed with this disease.

In Kneece's own words, "Breast cancer is more than scars on the breast; it can also scar the heart. We must address the psychological and social issues breast cancer brings if a woman is to master the disease. ... Getting well is more than surgery and treatments; it is a woman understanding the vital role she can play in managing her own physical and emotional recovery."¹

Interspersed throughout the book are quotations from breast cancer survivors, whose poignant words offer readers a profound sense of community—membership

in a club to which they would rather not belong but in which they might nonetheless find comfort. ❖

^a MammaCare[®] is a breast examination certification program, which purports to be "The only scientifically validated system for teaching physical examination of the breast." Their Web site offers a full description of their program: www.mammacare.com.

References

1. Kneece JC. *Your breast cancer treatment handbook: your guide to understanding the disease, treatments, emotions and recovery from breast cancer*. 5th ed. West Columbia (SC): EduCare; 2003.
2. American Cancer Society. Detailed guide: male breast cancer: what are the key statistics for male breast cancer? Available from: www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_1X_What_are_the_key_statistics_for_male_breast_cancer_28.asp?sitearea=&level= (accessed July 29, 2003).

Strength

Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, b 1947, weightlifter, bodybuilder, actor, and politician