

## *The Heart of a True Partnership:* Dr Oliver Goldsmith Receives “Winning Spirit Award for Partnership”

... *the patient and her physician began working together to create a program ...*

Time and time again, we have learned the importance of partnership in the practice of medicine. Nowhere is its value more evident than in the relationship between Kaiser Permanente (KP) and the Women's Information Network Against Breast Cancer (WIN ABC), an inspiring program which originated at Kaiser Permanente.

WIN ABC is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the levels of care, education, and support available for breast cancer patients and their families.<sup>1</sup> What started out as a partnership between a patient and her surgeon has grown into a collaboration between an entire health care system and an advocacy group. Together, KP and WIN ABC have had a tremendous impact on the lives of thousands of patients diagnosed with breast cancer as well as on their families.

### **A Patient and Her Physician: Teaming Up to Win**

This unique partnership started eight years ago, when Dr Brad Edgerton, a Permanente plastic surgeon at the KP West Los Angeles Medical Center, noticed some unique and impressive qualities in one of his patients. The patient, Betsy Mullen, had been diagnosed with breast cancer at age 33 and was working closely with Dr Edgerton to learn as much as possible about the disease. Ms Mullen took the initiative to seek out as many outside resources as she could find, but she came to realize that the standard of care as it then existed did not meet her need for emotional support.

To address this situation, the patient and her physician began working together to create a program that would provide information resources, emotional support, and a new standard of breast cancer care not only for Ms Mullen but also for other breast cancer patients. What resulted was the Breast Buddy Breast Care Program,<sup>2</sup> a WIN ABC program designed to pair breast cancer survivors with newly diagnosed patients to provide psychological peer support and to make resources available as needed.

### **Major Support From Kaiser Permanente and the Southern California Permanente Medical Group**

Ms Mullen and Dr Edgerton first set out to find funding for their unique program. Working under the auspices of their newly formed nonprofit entity,

WIN ABC, their first stop was to the office of Dr Oliver Goldsmith, Medical Director and Chairman of the Board for the Southern California Permanente Medical Group (SCPMG). After carefully considering the WIN ABC proposal and perceiving its importance and potential value to patients and their families, Dr Goldsmith granted seed funding for the program and designated a pilot site at the KP Fontana Medical Center.

### **National Impact and Recognition**

The partnership has not stopped there, however. In 1998, Kaiser Permanente again teamed up with WIN ABC—this time led by Dr Balasz (Ernie) Bodai, a surgeon at the KP Sacramento Medical Center. Together, they lobbied to pass an innovative piece of legislation, the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act, which resulted in the creation and nationwide distribution of the first semipostal fundraising postage stamp whose proceeds support biomedical breast cancer research. To date, with the support of such dignitaries as First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, the stamp has garnered almost \$11 million for breast cancer research and raised public awareness about this deadly disease.<sup>3</sup>

The Breast Buddy Breast Care Program<sup>2</sup> of WIN ABC has significantly grown, and last year it was nationally recognized as a Standard of Excellence by the American Association of Health Plans, a national trade association that represents more than 1000 health maintenance organizations such as KP.<sup>4</sup> Today, WIN ABC volunteers provide peer support and resources to hundreds of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients through the Breast Buddy Breast Care Program now expanded to serve indigent women at county hospitals. The program is now considered to be an excellent model of an effective partnership between a patient and her medical practitioner.

The latest recognition for this partnership has come from WIN ABC itself. On March 28, 2000, WIN ABC presented to Dr Oliver Goldsmith the program's first annual Winning Spirit Award for Partnership. The award honored Dr Goldsmith's strong, personal support for the relationship between Kaiser Permanente and WIN ABC. Dr Goldsmith's early belief in Dr Edgerton's and Betsy Mullen's vision for breast cancer care resulted in a



DEIDRE S. LIND is the Associate Director of Government and Community Relations for the California Division Public Affairs Department. She manages partnerships with consumer groups and strategies which enhance Kaiser Permanente's external profile. E-mail: deidre.s.lind@kp.org



powerful alliance benefiting thousands of breast cancer patients and their families.

Partnership often involves give-and-take: We must recognize that each partner is equally important to the end result. To best serve our patients, in addition, we must realize that individual needs are diverse and unique. We may not be able to fully meet each need by working alone, but by partnering with innovative organizations like WIN ABC, we can provide a coordinated and comprehensive health care experience for our patients. ❖

References

1. Women's Information Network Against Breast Cancer. <http://www.winabc.org> [accessed June 12, 2000].
2. Women's Information Network Against Breast Cancer. Breast Buddy Breast Care Program. <http://www.winabc.org/programs/html> [accessed June 12, 2000].
3. Lane J. Surgeon puts his stamp on breast cancer. *Permanente J* 1998 Summer;2(3):58-9.
4. American Association of Health Plans. <http://www.aahp.org> [accessed June 12, 2000].

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### Where Life Never Ends

Neverending dream where life never ends –  
 where people live in perfect harmony  
 where color is not wrong  
 where we can walk and sing without laughter of putdowns  
 where someone greets you with words of joy  
 where loneliness and inequality become a speck of dirt  
 in the winds of the past –  
 But reality must come first.

*Jeff White Bear Claws, Red Cloud Class of 1990,  
 Footsteps of Wisdom*