



Sharsheret aids young Jewish women with cancer

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Staff Writer

When 28-year-old Rochelle Shoretz was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001, she had nowhere to turn. The organizations, both Jewish and secular, that she contacted for support put her in touch with aunts and grandmothers. It wasn't until a neighbor introduced her to another young Jewish woman going through the same difficulties that she was able to lean on someone else who truly understood what she was experiencing.

Five months later, in December 2001, Shoretz founded Sharsheret, a national organization based in Teaneck, N.J., that provides aid to young Jewish women (defined as premenopausal) with breast cancer.

The organization will hold a national teleconference, "Breast Cancer and the Next Generation," on Nov. 4 (see Details box).

About 850 women from 39 states are currently enrolled in Sharsheret's signature service, the Link Program, and thousands more call in for free information and materials, according to Director of Operations Elana Silber.

The Link Program matches women of similar backgrounds and lifestyles from across the country so they can discuss questions and concerns with like-minded people.

"Generally by the time women with breast cancer are looking for support, they already have a medical team in place," said Silber. "They have their oncologist, they have their surgeon. But what they're looking for and what they're finding in Sharsheret is a place to turn for guidance, reassurance and a sense of community within the community."

She added that the organization is careful to match people with similar religious values and similar problems, and that Sharsheret is open to women from all denominations of Judaism.

"When you go to a doctor, their goal is to make you healthy right away, and it's not always to protect the rest of your values," said Amy Dubitsky, a Phoenix resident and member of Sharsheret's national advisory board.

"Let's say a woman (recovers) from breast cancer, and she's not married yet or newly married and hasn't had children," Dubitsky continued. "Her oncologist isn't necessarily thinking about fertility issues and stuff like that. Sharsheret will help you with that, or you'll speak to other people who have been through those same things and have (similar) values."

She gave the example of how an Orthodox woman who recently underwent a mastectomy might seek advice on how to handle herself at a mikvah.

Silber said that although its programs are geared toward young Jewish women, Sharsheret will help both Jews and non-Jews of any age. "Anyone who feels they can benefit from the program can call in," she said. "We also refer women to other organizations if we don't provide a service."

In addition to the Link Program, Sharsheret offers nine other services, including education and outreach, quality of life, which addresses the cosmetic side effects of treatment, and individualized counseling regarding hereditary and genetic issues having to do with breast cancer.

The nonprofit is also in the planning stages of providing support to women with ovarian cancer, which it hopes to launch in full force in 2011, according to Silber.

Call (866) 474-2774 or visit sharsheret.org. Amy Dubitsky is an account manager at Jewish News and the wife of Rabbi Michael Dubitsky.

Details

- What: Sharsheret national teleconference: "Breast Cancer and the Next Generation"
- Topics: "How do I talk to a young child about my breast cancer diagnosis?"; "How can I help my teenager during cancer treatment?"; and "What can I do to educate my young daughter about her risk of developing breast cancer?"
- When: 6-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4
- Cost: Free
- Registration: (866) 474-2774 or events@sharsheret.org