

Raise breast cancer awareness, work toward Vitality

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As soon as we sat down for lunch it got eerily silent.

"I have something to tell you. I felt a lump on my breast the other day, and I just went to the doctor who informed me it's a tumor. They're going to perform a biopsy to test if it's malignant."

I was left in complete disbelief.

No, this wasn't a conversation with my grandmother, great aunt or even my mother; this was my 19-year-old best friend talking. How could she, so young, possibly have breast cancer?

I've known Amy since kindergarten, and it truly feels like just days ago we were playing together on the playground. How could she possibly be encountering such a grown-up problem?

Though I've known many people with breast cancer, including close relatives, they were all far older than Amy. Amy has always been in good health, and I simply could not understand how she could be facing cancer. That six-letter word is so utterly awful, and yet it is so widespread that it has undoubtedly touched everyone. I still could not believe, though, that the newest way cancer was going to shake my life was through someone my own age.

Though breast cancer, like most cancers, is commonly misconceived as only affecting an older demographic, it can affect women of all ages, including college students. While breast cancer risk does increase with age, young women must be aware that the threat of breast cancer still certainly exists, particularly if there is a family history of the disease. In fact, it is crucial for younger women to be vigilant about looking out for signs of breast cancer (mainly breast lumps) because it is often more aggressive in younger women and thus harder to treat, resulting in lower survival rates.

Because she had never felt anything like it before, Amy grew concerned when she felt a lump, or what she described as an awkwardly hard area on her breast. Although she, like me, could not believe it was a tumor, her mother encouraged her to visit a doctor. Amy's doctor confirmed the unthinkable — it really was a tumor.

Though Amy is still waiting to hear if her tumor is cancerous, the threat of being a 19-year-old with breast cancer is constantly looming over her and all her loved ones' heads.

Because breast cancer is something everyone, including college students, should be aware of, Hillel's Health and Wellness Initiative, Vitality, will be hosting a week of events to educate students about how to protect themselves and support those living with the disease. The week begins this Wednesday, April 1 with a Lunch and Learn at 12 p.m. at Hillel with Mari Anne Paraskevas, a young breast cancer survivor and member of the Tufts community, who will tell the amazing story of her struggle with breast cancer over the past year. There will also be a special Shabbat on Friday, April 3 at Hillel dedicated to breast cancer awareness. The week will conclude with "Pump it for the Cure" on Sunday, April 5 from 12 to 4 p.m. at Hillel. All the proceeds from the event "Pump it for the Cure" will go towards Sharsheret, a non-profit organization dedicated to young Jewish women living with breast cancer.

"Pump it for the Cure" will provide students with the opportunity to support breast cancer research and prevention with a day of education, Pilates, yoga, Zumba, kickboxing, massages by professional massage therapists, dances taught by Spirit of Color, a large raffle and a delicious bagel brunch.

Due to the unfortunate news Amy presented me with over spring break, this event and my work with Vitality are even more meaningful to me. Breast cancer awareness is such an important cause, and now that it has so intimately touched my life, I am even more passionate about bringing greater awareness of breast cancer to the Tufts community.

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Annie Dreyer is a freshman who has not declared a major. She is on the board of Vitality.



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