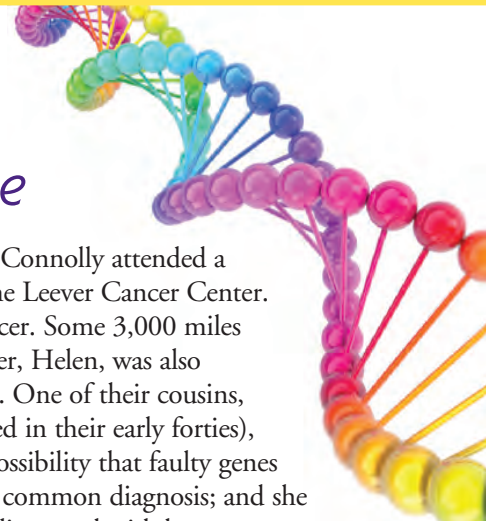


AWARE! | HL

Prevention and awareness information from The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center

Family Connections: *Understanding the Genetics of Disease*



Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, APRN, AGN-BC (left) and Paula Connolly.

Last fall, Middlebury resident Paula Connolly attended a community education program at the Leever Cancer Center. The topic: the genetics of breast cancer. Some 3,000 miles away in Dublin, Ireland, Paula's sister, Helen, was also engaged in a bit of genetic discovery. One of their cousins, Margaret (whose mom and sister died in their early forties), determined she would explore the possibility that faulty genes might be at the heart of the family's common diagnosis; and she asked her Aunt Kathleen (who was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 76) if she would be willing to participate in genetic testing. Kathleen's results revealed a BRCA 2 gene mutation.

When another cousin, Lorraine, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2017, Helen decided it was time for her to participate in genetic testing, and she convinced Paula to do the same.

"Our mother was one of nine children," Paula explains, "five girls and four boys. Two of our aunts died of breast cancer at very young ages, as did one of their daughters.

"After the Leever program I approached one of the presenters, APRN Yvonne Ruddy-Stein," says Paula. "I told her about my family, expressing relief that Helen's test was clean, thinking that covered me as well."

Not necessarily so, said Yvonne, a certified Advanced Genetics Nurse. Yvonne explained how genetic inheritance patterns — which genes you get from your mother and which you get from your father — may vary across siblings. In Paula's case, there was still a significant chance that she, too, could carry the familial BRCA 2 mutation. She made an appointment with Yvonne to explore that possibility through genetic testing.

Genetic tests look for chromosomal, genetic or protein changes in an individual's genetic code. The results can be used to confirm specific genetic conditions that may increase one's lifetime risk of developing cancer; they can also rule them out. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 1,000 genetic tests are currently in use, with more in development. And while many people are familiar with BRCA testing, which looks for mutations in the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 susceptibility genes, other cancer risks can be evaluated through genetic testing as well, including ovarian cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, pancreatic cancer and melanoma.

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“Genetic testing is more than a simple blood draw or saliva sample,” explains Yvonne. “The process includes genetic counseling both before and after the test. Pre-test counseling involves a thorough examination of an individual’s personal medical and family histories to determine which panel of genes we should assess; we also talk about possible outcomes. In post-test counseling, we discuss the results and any ongoing management and testing plans that might be recommended.”

Thanks to Margaret’s persistence, Paula learned that other family members had also tested positive for the BRCA 2 mutation, making it one of the genes Yvonne would assess.

“That a BRCA 2 mutation had already been identified in this family was not typical,” says Yvonne. “It gave us a head start, but there were still unknowns that needed to be factored in — Paula’s mother had a bowel cancer, for example, and we’re still waiting to learn the cause of death for an aunt in England.”

For Paula, the news was good: she does not carry the BRCA 2 mutation. But that isn’t the end of her story.

“Patients with negative test results don’t just walk away saying, ‘All is good, I’m never going to get cancer,’” Yvonne says. “Even if an individual does not carry a gene mutation, their personal and family histories may still elevate their lifetime risk of developing the disease. I plug that information into risk models to help make that assessment.”

In Paula’s case, the uncertainty about the cause of death for her aunt in England tipped the scales on her risk assessment. After running multiple models, Yvonne found that Paula’s lifetime risk of developing breast cancer peaked at 22.4%, nearly double the 12% risk the general population faces. As a result, Paula will add yearly breast MRIs to a screening regimen that already includes mammograms and ultrasounds.

“For me, genetic testing brought both peace of mind and important reminders about staying vigilant,” says Paula. “I know what to watch for, what to communicate to my healthcare providers and how best to advise my daughters about their health moving forward.”

Talk to your doctor to see if genetic testing is right for you.

Good genetic testing relies, in part, on collecting good data up front.

That means knowing your full family history. According to APRN and Advanced Genetics Nurse Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, gathering medical histories for your parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins on both sides of the family is the best place to start. Don’t wait until it’s too late. Talk to your relatives now! Visit leevercancercenter.org to download our “Ask Now” guide to help you collect all the information you need to get started.

ask now



According to the National Institutes of Health, **more than 1,000 genetic tests** are currently in use, with more in development.



Learn more about Yvonne and her work in our Team Spotlight on Page 3.

TOGETHER, WE ARE STRONGER THAN CANCER

One of the biggest barriers to quality cancer care can be the lack of transportation. That’s why the American Cancer Society Road to Recovery program provides patients with free rides to treatment.

Need a ride? Want to volunteer? Contact The American Cancer Society at cancer.org/roadtorecovery or 800-227-2345.



Road To Recovery



Spotlight on: Yvonne Ruddy-Stein APRN, AGN-BC

Yvonne Ruddy-Stein has spent her entire career as a nurse, having earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing from the University of Pennsylvania. For nearly 15 years, she has been part of the medical team at Polokoff Breast Care, LLC in Southbury.

"In 2005 Dr. Polokoff noticed that there were no local options for patients considering genetic testing," explains Yvonne. "They were required to make multiple trips out of the area. It was very onerous — we wanted to make it easier."

Yvonne enrolled in a rigorous academic program at City of Hope Hospital in Duarte, California, where she completed their Intensive Course in Cancer Risk Assessment. The curriculum, which trains non-genetic providers to offer genetic counseling services, started Yvonne on a path that led to her certification as an Advanced Genetics Nurse.

"This is a very complex, ever-changing field," Yvonne says. "My credentials allow me to offer all of its related services, from ordering tests and interpreting results, to counseling patients both before and after the test."

According to Yvonne, patients are typically referred for genetic testing by their healthcare providers, though self-referrals are not uncommon. Intake and testing sessions generally take 75 minutes, and can often be scheduled within a few days or weeks. Testing consists of a simple blood draw or saliva sample, which can reveal genetic mutations that may increase an individual's lifetime risk of developing a wide range of cancers, including breast cancer, colon cancer, pancreatic cancer and melanoma. Results arrive in about a month and are delivered to patients during a post-test counseling session, where Yvonne also delivers data from separate medical risk models and offers recommendations for ongoing healthcare management. (See the cover article for one patient's story.)

"I think genetic testing is valuable because it can rule in or rule out a genetic mutation, which can, in turn, influence an individual's risk of developing cancer," Yvonne explains. "It gives patients important information that can both help prevent cancers and detect cancers early. It is an incredible tool that we've been happy to offer patients closer to home."

This fall, Yvonne began offering her services at the Leever Cancer Center every Wednesday morning. To make an appointment with Yvonne at Leever, please call 203-262-2300.

"Genetic testing gives patients important information that can both help prevent cancers and detect cancers early."

— Yvonne Ruddy-Stein

Dermatology Screening Results

Five local dermatologists from Yale Dermatology-Middlebury volunteered their time in May to offer free skin cancer screenings at The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center (HLRCC).

"Our commitment to community healthcare extends beyond cancer treatment and care to prevention, education and early detection," says Kevin Kniery, HLRCC Executive Director. "We're extremely grateful to the physicians and volunteers who gave their time for this important event."

Over the course of one afternoon, 88 patients were screened for signs of skin cancer. Of those, 13 had probable skin cancers and were recommended to see dermatology for biopsy; nine patients had pre-cancerous conditions and were recommended for treatment; 10 had lesions that were recommended for follow-up; 56 patients were benign. Educational resources were also distributed to participants.



Pictured from left to right: Elizabeth Ramos, RMA; Alicia Little, MD; Ilya Lim, MD; Christopher Bunick, MD; Sara Perkins, MD; Amanda Zubek, MD; and Sarah Cianciolo, LPN.

RELAY FOR LIFE 2018:

The Power of Community

Relay for Life has come a long way since 1985, when Dr. Gordy Klatt spent 24 hours on a track in Tacoma, WA, to raise \$27,000 for the American Cancer Society. Since then, thousands of communities in 27 countries across the globe have hosted Relay for Life events, Greater Waterbury among them.

“This has become the signature event for the American Cancer Society and a signature event for our community,” says Leever Cancer Center Executive Director Kevin Kniery, who was among the featured speakers at the June 2 Greater Waterbury event. “This year marked the 25th time our friends, family, neighbors, survivors, caregivers and warriors came together locally to support the important work being done by the American Cancer Society. In a very real sense, this event defines the power of community and the good that comes from working together.”

Globally, Relay for Life events have raised more than \$5 billion in 33 years. On the home front, Greater Waterbury alone raised more than \$151,000 this year, thanks to the 455 participants — 190 of them survivors — from 44 teams, including Leever’s own, “On the Wings of Hope.”



Above: Dr. Victor Chang’s enthusiastic daughters.



It’s not too early to start thinking about the next Greater Waterbury Relay for Life! Mark your calendars for June 8, 2019, and join us at a new location, Holy Cross High School, Oronoke Road, Waterbury.

Above left: Survivors Chris Damato and Andrea Armbruster.

Above right: Gerald Mullins, Blest Edge, Leslie McKinny and Jada Howard of Team Leever.

Left: HLRCC’s Deborah and John Parkinson with Melissa and Bill Seres celebrating the day.

Congratulations, Dr. Ravalese!



On October 6, Dr. Joseph Ravalese III was honored for his efforts in the field of cancer at the Quilts That Care annual fundraiser. Dr. Nicole Sookhan, last year’s recipient, was there to present him with his award.

Bring Home the Magic of “It’s a Wonderful Life”

Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings... purchase a beautiful keepsake bell like the Bevin Bell in the classic holiday movie (produced by Bevin Brothers Manufacturing Company in East Hampton, CT).

Bells are \$15 each. All proceeds benefit The George I. Bailey Indigent Fund at HLRCC. Call 203-575-5548 or visit the Leever Cancer Center website to order. Quantities are limited.



Team Leever participated in the Seymour Pink 5k run event “Pounding the Pavement for Pink.” The Leever Center was an event sponsor.



Linky's Garden

The peaceful, healing garden patio at the Leever Cancer Center was given new life and a new look! We're grateful to those who made it happen.

SURVIVORS DAY BUTTERFLY RELEASE 2018: A Celebration of Hope

The power and impact of Leever’s inaugural On the Wings of Hope Survivors Day Butterfly Release ceremony in 2017 ensured its return in 2018. On August 4, more than 100 survivors, caregivers, family and friends gathered at the Leever Cancer Center to celebrate the hope and joy that survivorship brings, while honoring the memories of those who have passed.

“This event has become quite meaningful for our community,” said Deborah Parkinson, Operations Director at the Leever Cancer Center. “It is both personal and powerful. It is a gathering filled with messages of hope conveyed through poetry, song, readings and fellowship. This year, we also read the names of those being honored and remembered through the butterfly release, which was especially poignant.”

Throughout history and across cultures, the butterfly has been seen as a symbol of renewal, transformation, transcendence and hope. In Asian cultures, the butterfly is a symbol of long life. Participants at the August 4 event were invited to purchase and release butterflies to honor, remember or celebrate a loved one. For each, it was a moment of peace and a time of personal reflection.



Above: Very special thanks to Deb Sheahan who coordinated the thumb-print butterfly.

Left: Thanks to all who participated in the On the Wings of Hope Survivors Day Butterfly Release 2018.





The Spices of Life

By Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO

If you want to turn a recipe from bland and boring to interesting and complex, try adding herbs and spices. Imagine apple pie without cinnamon, or tomato sauce without basil, oregano, garlic and pepper. It turns out that herbs and spices not only enhance the flavor of food, but they also add significant health benefits.

Herbs are from the leaves of plants (basil, parsley, cilantro, mint), while spices like cinnamon are from the seeds, berries, bark or roots of a plant. Research shows that herbs and spices are loaded with healthy compounds, called phytochemicals, that help to fight inflammation and reduce cell damage in the body, possibly resulting in preventing or reducing illness or disease, including cancer. They add so much extra flavor that it is often possible to reduce the amount of sugar and salt added to food, making the recipe even healthier.

Dried herbs may have more intense flavor than fresh; if the recipe calls for fresh herbs, you can substitute about half (or less) the quantity of dried herbs. Fresh herbs can be stored for several days by rinsing with water, wrapping in a damp paper towel and placing in a plastic bag.

If you can, choose real spices (fresh or dried), rather than herbs and spices sold in supplement (pill or capsule) form. The exact content of these products can't be verified, because there is a lack of government regulation of supplements. Fresh or dried herbs and spices contain an "army" of antioxidants that work together to provide multiple health benefits. It's unknown if you get those same

benefits with supplements containing a single ingredient.

3 OF THE HEALTHIEST SPICES (listed alphabetically)

1 Cinnamon: Cinnamon adds sweetness to foods, often reducing the amount of added sugar needed in recipes. It may help reduce inflammation, decrease cell damage, fight bacteria and protect against certain diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Some studies have suggested that cinnamon can help to lower blood sugar, although these results are mixed. Although most popular in baked goods, adding cinnamon to roasted vegetables, chicken and grains like rice and couscous adds warmth and sweetness.

2 Garlic: The powerful compound in garlic, allicin, is responsible for its considerable health benefits. It can help to lower cholesterol, as well as the risk of heart disease and hypertension, and may help to stop the growth of cancer cells. Allicin is formed after the garlic clove is chopped or crushed and allowed to rest. Add to meats, fish, chicken, soups, sauces, grains and vegetables.

3 Ginger: Ginger can be purchased in powder form where spices are located, or in its root form, found in the produce department. It helps prevent cell damage, having both anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, and can help to lower blood sugar and blood pressure. Ginger is a well-known remedy for nausea, indigestion, and possibly motion sickness. Use it in stir-fries, stews or sauces, as well as baked goods. Homemade ginger tea settles an upset stomach.

These are just a few of the hundreds of herbs and spices available to enhance the taste and nutritional value of food. Don't forget about basil, thyme, mint, cardamom, cloves, cocoa, turmeric and cumin, just to name a few. If you are feeling adventurous, make your own blends! Be generous and enjoy the aromas, taste and health benefits of these easy-to-make spice rub recipes below.

To read this article in its entirety, visit our website: leevercancercenter.org.

ITALIAN BLEND

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp. dried basil
- 2 tbsp. dried oregano
- 2 tbsp. dried rosemary
- 2 tbsp. dried marjoram
- 2 tbsp. dried thyme
- 2 tbsp. dried cilantro (optional)
- 2 tbsp. dried savory (optional)
- 2 tbsp. red pepper flakes (or less for less heat)

Use it to season everything Italian or not. Makes about 1 cup. Adapted from allrecipes.com.

BARBEQUE RUB

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp. paprika
- 1 tbsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. ground thyme
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1-1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1-1/2 tsp. ground pepper (or less for less heat)

Assemble ingredients. Pat generously on poultry, fish, beef or lamb before cooking. Makes just under 1/2 cup. Adapted from thepioneerwoman.com.

Questions about nutrition? Contact our nutritionist Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO, at 203-575-5510 or email ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org.

A Community of Caring

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center wishes to express its appreciation and a sincere thank you to its neighbors and friends by recognizing the spirit and hard work of the members of our community in fulfilling the Mission of the Leever Cancer Center.

ART WITH HEART

Thanks to **Leever PET/CT Technician Christina Kidulas (top right)**, who put the fun in fundraiser with a paint night party to benefit the Leever Cancer Center. Budding artists had tons of fun while raising \$850!



HEARTS OF GOLD, AWARDS OF SILVER

The Girl Scout Silver Award is the highest award a Cadette can earn. They do so through projects designed to “make the community better.” **Kelly McSherry, Julia Krijgsman and Maranda Balcarzak (lower right)** worked toward silver by collecting books, stuffed animals, dolls and more for children and pre-teens going through cancer treatment. Thank you, girls!



MUSIC FOR THE SOUL

Nashville-based singer/songwriter **David G. Smith** performed in our lobby in August, delighting country fans and music lovers.

WITH CLASS

Thank you to the **Sacred Heart High School Class of 1959**, who donated fleece throws for Leever patients.

WHEN GIVING IS THE GIFT

Inspired by the many generous donations we receive, **the staff at the Leever Cancer Center** came together to deliver a gift of our own this summer to honor a member of our team who lost her life in a domestic violence tragedy. Our staff (including **Melissa Seres, right**) collected toiletries, diapers, monetary donations and other items to benefit the clients of Safe Haven, a nonprofit offering support and services to victims of domestic violence.



PAYING IT FORWARD

Chris Damato (above, second from left) held a special event called “Christine’s Comeback from Cancer” in May to celebrate her survivorship and to thank everyone who helped her along the way. The money raised was used to purchase gift cards for patients.

Aware!

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We encourage your feedback.
If there is a cancer topic you would like covered, to respond to an article you've read, or to be put on our mailing list, please call 203-575-5555 or email: dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org



THE HAROLD LEEVER
REGIONAL CANCER CENTER

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Waterbury, CT 06708
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Community Events and Monthly Support Groups

FALL/WINTER

NEW MONTHLY EVENT:

TAKE 2: BRAVE AT HEART 2

**Second Wednesday of each month, 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM
in the HLRCC Meditation Room**

Like our long-standing Brave at Heart group, Brave at Heart 2 offers support and community for women and men dealing with breast cancer. Unlike Brave at Heart, Brave at Heart 2 meets during the day, thanks to the generosity of group leader and survivor Anne Pringle. Call Anne for more information, 203-910-7582.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY: LOOK GOOD, FEEL BETTER!: monthly, 1st Tuesday, 2 PM – 4 PM, contact the ACS at 203-756-8888

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY: REACH TO RECOVERY: by appointment, contact the ACS at 203-756-8888

ART THERAPY: monthly, 2nd and 4th Friday, 2 PM, contact Deborah Parkinson: 203-575-5564

BRAVE AT HEART BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP: monthly, 1st Wednesday, 7 PM – 9 PM, contact Anne Pringle: 203-910-7582

BRAVE AT HEART 2: monthly, 2nd Wednesday, 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM, contact Anne Pringle: 203-910-7582

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS: monthly, 2nd Wednesday, 6:45 PM – 10 PM, contact Sharon: 860-384-1398

CT MULTIPLE MYELOMA FIGHTERS SUPPORT GROUP: at Prospect Library, monthly, 2nd Tuesday, 6 PM – 8 PM, contact Robin Tuohy: 203-206-3536

ENERGY THERAPY: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP: monthly, 3rd Monday, 12 PM – 1 PM, contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

TOOLS FOR HOPE AND HEALING:

BUILDING YOUR SELF-CARE TOOLBOX

Leever's innovative series features no-cost programs and activities for cancer patients and caregivers, designed to help them navigate a path toward health and healing, even in the most challenging of times.

Past programs have included chair yoga, meditation, vision boards, breathwork and journaling. Visit leevercancercenter.org for upcoming Toolbox workshops.



FREEDOM FROM SMOKING: an 8-week smoking cessation series, contact Sandra Micalizzi, APRN, CDE, Community Outreach Nurse, at 203-575-5573 for information on the start of the next series.

HOPE MUTUAL AID GROUP FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR LOVED ONES: monthly, 1st and 3rd Tuesday, 12 PM – 1 PM, contact Melissa Seres: 203-575-5511

JOURNALING: A WAY TO HEAL FROM YOUR CANCER EXPERIENCE: Friday, 10 AM – 11:30 AM, contact Bob Devito: 203-910-3107

QUILTS THAT CARE: monthly, 1st and 3rd Monday, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Deb V: 860-945-0184

WATERBURY AREA OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP: monthly, 1st Monday, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Bob Baker: 860-248-1116

WATERBURY AREA THYCA GROUP, A THYROID CANCER SUPPORT GROUP: monthly, last Tuesday, 6 PM – 7 PM, contact Renee Hurne: 203-598-6859 or Dot Torretta: 203-756-3481

WOMAN TO WOMAN BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP: monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 7 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Theresa Lombardo: 860-274-2200

Call contact person to confirm that group is as scheduled. Meeting times may be rescheduled to accommodate holidays or special meetings. See leevercancercenter.org for ongoing events.