

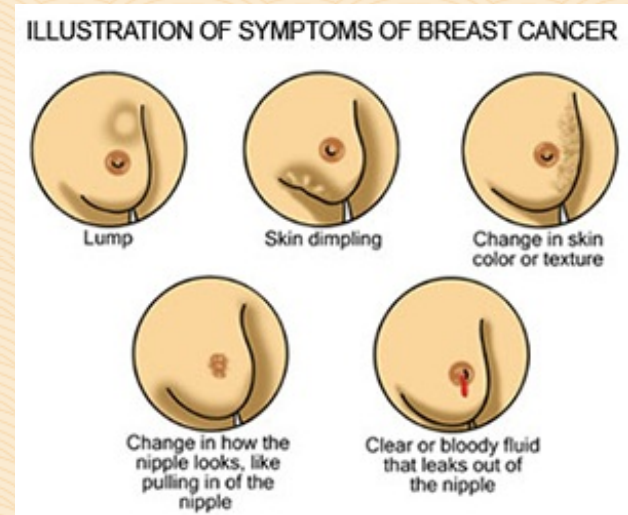
OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

by Vickie Comrie

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When deep in the throes of alcoholism or drug addiction, a woman generally does not or cannot take proper care of her health, including self-examining for breast cancer symptoms on a monthly basis and getting regular mammograms. Maybe this woman is homeless due to her addiction or other unfortunate circumstances, or has no health insurance to cover the cost of a mammogram, which ranges from \$75 to \$200, although there are clinics in every state in the U.S. which offer low cost or free mammograms. Many women who are addicted with children could be afraid that if they saw a doctor for anything at all, he would find her unfit to raise her children and report her to Child Protective Services. I've heard more than one addicted woman say that she would almost rather have cancer than be an addict, as in the minds of their family and friends, cancer is a legitimate illness, whereas addiction is a matter of laziness and lack of willpower, even though the DSM 5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders, 5th edition) does classify addiction and alcoholism as diseases. There are many reasons women, addicted or not, fail to regularly maintain their health--for instance, out of fear of what they might find.

But we cannot deny or hide from the statistics--every year in the U.S., 1 in 8 women are diagnosed with breast cancer. Breast cancer is only behind lung cancer for the number of deaths in women per year from all





cancers, although breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer. Another alarming statistic--African-American women in the U.S. die at a 41% higher rate than other races combined, and the average age of diagnosis for an African-American woman is 57, but the average age of diagnosis for a Caucasian woman is 62. There could be numerous reasons behind these grim statistics--for one, 25% of all African-American women live under the poverty line. According to Dr. Lewis Jones, director of breast imaging at McLaren Greater Lansing Breast Care Center, "black women have a tendency to seek out breast treatment at a later stage than their counterparts." "One of the reasons is that black women, in general, tend to present late to the doctors when they have

problems with their breasts. A lot of them feel, that well, it will probably go away," he says. Black women are also more often the heads of their households, and may put off treatment in order to keep everything running smoothly rather than take time off to go to the doctor." But if caught early, the outlook for survival of all races of women continues to improve due to advances in treatment and early detection. If tumors are caught at an early stage, the death rate drops significantly.

Some women in recovery may fear that if diagnosed with cancer, they would have to use painkilling drugs that would bring them back into addiction. But there are alternative treatments being used that do not involve narcotics, such as acupuncture and accupressure, biofeedback, meditation, and massage therapy to name a few. Even if narcotics must be prescribed, there is a difference between addiction and physical dependence. According to the Hazelden Treatment Center, "In this context, however, physical dependence and addiction are not the same. Addiction refers to the compulsive use of drugs for reasons other than pain control. Careful treatment planning can relieve withdrawal without triggering such use."





Regret is a terrible thing. Steve Jobs, who recently passed away from pancreatic cancer, said that his biggest regret was not getting checked out sooner when he first began to feel ill. It's time to take responsibility for your health; think of it as a stepping-stone to regaining control of your life. And for God's sake, stop smoking. And if you can't do it for yourself, do it for your children, whose life would forever be changed if they lost their mother to a treatable disease. Many people who get clean and sober trade one addiction--alcohol, drugs, for another--coffee and cigarettes. Just poke your head into any normal 12-step program meeting and see the haze fill the room.

You owe it to yourself to try to be around long enough to enjoy your life with all its major milestones, including the birth of your grandchildren, watching them grow, playing with them. You can do something right now--give yourself a breast exam--that could put you on the road to treating yourself better. You aren't done yet. Take care of yourself.

If you are having trouble stopping drinking or using drugs, or would like more information, please contact us, your doctor, or use the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator.

Sources:

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Please watch the following YouTube Videos for more information.