

Cancer Patients Looking Good . . . Feeling Better

The six women gathered around the table looked like any six friends at a make-over party. They smiled and laughed, shared make-up colors, and tossed out frequent suggestions and compliments.

What the casual observer would not realize, however, is the one thing that these women actually have in common. They are all cancer patients, participating in an American Cancer Society program called Look Good . . . Feel Better.

The program, developed by the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association (CTFA), the National Cosmetology Association, and the American Cancer Society, was designed specifically for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation treatments. These patients commonly experience temporary changes in appearance, such as hair loss, skin color and texture changes, and a difference in nail strength and texture. Look Good . . . Feel Better provides the patient with a sampling of cosmetics and professional advice in applying that make-up, within the structure of a two-hour "class."

Although the program was first available in Wisconsin almost two years ago, it is within the last year that it has really taken off. And taken off it has. There are now regularly scheduled Look Good . . . Feel Better sessions in cities throughout the state. The response has been so positive in the Madison area that three classes a month are now being offered. They rotate between University Hospital and Clinics, Meriter Cancer Care Clinic and Dean Medical Center. Patients can

attend whatever class works into their schedule—not necessarily one at the clinic where they receive treatment.

"I love being part of this program," said Clare Quale, who along with Arlene Jerdee and Betty Otterson organizes and conducts the Madison classes. "We call them parties," she added, "because that's really what they are. We always have a good time."

A video shown at the beginning of each party gives participants the chance to hear from other women who have been through the program and to see the "before" and "after" differences. The video stresses that how a patient feels is due in large part to their mental attitude. One way to boost that attitude is to look good.

'A Lilt in Their Step'

To a cancer patient with no hair or eyebrows, dry skin, and constant nausea, looking good may seem like something that's easier said than done. That's where the Look Good . . . Feel Better program begins to work its magic.

"I've seen women come to a party so devastated about their cancer that they can barely say their name when they arrive," said Quale. "After two hours of beauty tips, a change in appearance, and the support of several other women who all feel the same, they actually walk out of here with a lilt in their step."

This transformation is one of the reasons that the three Madison women continue to be involved with the program. In exchange, all three are wonderful role models for the women they meet.

"I had breast cancer fifteen years ago," Arlene Jerdee told the group at a recent Madison party. "I was told at that time that I had less than a 20 percent chance to be alive in five years. So I want you to put yourself in my shoes—I'm a survivor."

Betty Otterson explained that it has been two years since her breast cancer surgery. She has completed chemotherapy, but will be taking tamoxifen for the rest of her life.

As the women got settled, Clare Quale circled the room, taking "before" photos for each participant. There was nothing in her polished appearance or enthusiastic manner to indicate that she has ever experienced cancer. She is, however, still undergoing treatment for breast cancer. In fact, the stylish fanny pack she wore around her waist holds the chemo pack that gives her the medicine every 22 seconds.

Cosmetics Are Donated

The class started quietly as the women introduced themselves and told a little of their history with cancer. Understanding looks were accompanied by a few tears as they talked about their illnesses. But the moment of sadness was not allowed to remain as the women prepared themselves for the business at hand—looking good . . . and feeling better.

Lois Thiede-Stallman, a certified LGFB facilitator and cosmetologist from J.C. Penney's East Towne Salon in Madison, spent the next hour and a half demonstrating, encouraging, giving tips, and explaining make-up dos and don'ts to the group.