

About Health TV with Jeanne Blake
Ovarian Cancer: Ovations for the Cure
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JEANNE BLAKE: Welcome to *About Health TV*, I'm Jeanne Blake. Ovarian cancer has long been called a silent cancer. A woman with the disease usually doesn't know she has it until it has spread. On this edition of *About Health TV* we'll talk with two women living with ovarian cancer and with the executive director of an organization called Ovations for the Cure. An organization dedicated to raising funds for research and raising awareness about ovarian cancer. First we welcome Patricia Franchi-Flaherty. Thanks so much for coming in to talk with us and help raise awareness about ovarian cancer. Patricia when did you learn that you ovarian cancer and how?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: About 8 ½ years ago I went in for my annual exam with my Gyn and at that time because of my family history, I had a mother who died of ovarian cancer. She was a very progressive Gyn and she was doing in addition to the PAP smear and everything, she was also doing a blood test on me which is called a CA125 that supposedly is a test that can help detect when you have cancer but also a vaginal ultrasound. It was during my vaginal ultrasound they found a 6 cm tumor. I was seeing a surgeon within a week and in surgery within a few days after that.

JEANNE BLAKE: Because of your mother, we all know that a woman is at an increased risk if her mother has ovarian cancer a woman is at increased risk herself. Were you concerned about it?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I also lost two sisters to cancer but a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It was always heavy in my mind and watching out for it. That's why I really loved my Gyn at the time because she was so proactive in those days. There is no early detection for ovarian cancer so she was trying to pull whatever she could tests and have me take it. I'm really appreciative of that.

JEANNE BLAKE: One of my closest friends was diagnosed with ovarian cancer Stage IV. Her mother had breast cancer and while she had mammograms every six months she never had a vaginal ultrasound. I've always wondered why and of course my friend later, after she was diagnosed, was angry about never having been given that and didn't know to ask for it herself.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I guess it's up to your doctor. My doctor was very proactive. At least you have mammograms for breast cancer; you have nothing for ovarian cancer. I also found out from genetic testing I'm BRACA I which most likely my mother was BRACA I.

JEANNE BLAKE: Can you explain for people.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: BRACA I is a gene mutation. It's really what happens. My immune system is compromised so that cancer cells can penetrate the cells and I'm talking very layman right now but I can't fight the cancer and that's why it spreads. It also will be passed on. They found out from testing my siblings, my older sister has BRACA I even though she doesn't have the disease, she has BRACA I and she had a hysterectomy when I had mine 8 ½ years ago but she's at 80% risk of having breast cancer.

JEANNE BLAKE: She had a hysterectomy to have her ovaries removed so that she technically can't get ovarian cancer?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Technically yes.

JEANNE BLAKE: She's at a great risk for breast cancer?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: And two out of her four children have BRACA I.

JEANNE BLAKE: Wow, that's a heavy genetic load to carry.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Yes.

JEANNE BLAKE: They chose to get tested. That's interesting.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: They have a very encouraging aunt.

JEANNE BLAKE: Good for you.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: The whole idea is you take the negative and make it a positive. I'm using my disease as a quest to resolve some of the issues that are happening in society. Ovarian cancer is never spoken about. There is very little research. I was so disappointed in finding out when I got diagnosed that over the 30 years my mother had been gone, that very little research had been done. It makes you angry. Also, even my Gyn, as good as she was, she never said, Patty, these are the signs. They are very subtle but at the same time, tell me if you start feeling bloated or whatever and she didn't.

JEANNE BLAKE: And were you though? When you look back on it now did you have some symptoms?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: It was interesting because six months prior to my exam I was having a thyroid issue and I was seeing a doctor, a specialist, and I kept complaining to her that I felt bloated that I thought the medication wasn't right. She kept testing me for my thyroid and said no everything looks fine. Even reading my family history which they all take, no flags went up. I did feel

bloated six months prior. I was diagnosed, that was in August, in February I was diagnosed with Stage 3 C.

JEANNE BLAKE: Were you bloated temporarily?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: No, consistently.

JEANNE BLAKE: Okay. Consistently and you thought it was your thyroid.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I kept thinking I had gained weight and she was pooh-pooing me about women and how we are about our weight and how the vanity and all of that and I said I know my body and this is not right. Something's not functioning.

JEANNE BLAKE: Given the fact that you knew your mother had obviously died of ovarian cancer why do you think that the red flag didn't go off in your own mind where you were more proactive in asking?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Because I didn't know the signs. I didn't know if this was my thyroid not functioning because nobody ever said to me, these are the signs. These are some of the signs and if they're consistent. I mean now I can recite them in my sleep and I tell everybody if this is something that we all feel, bloated, constipated, whatever and it is consistent then you need to call your doctor right away. Don't wait like I did.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let's put the signs up right now. They're simple and they're basic and they can be signs of a lot of other troubles but as you say if you feel them and if they're consistent go to your doctor.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Absolutely.

JEANNE BLAKE: So what if they say it's something else. If you feel bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, trouble eating or feeling full quickly or urinary symptoms such as urgent or frequent feelings of needing to go or urinate. Any one of those, any one or a combination?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Could be either one. My problem was bloating. I didn't have any of the other symptoms. At the time I was probably in the best health that I was. I was running, I was exercising. There was nothing else that I could think of that was causing this problem.

JEANNE BLAKE: Your treatment included what?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Once I was diagnosed? I had the surgery. I had my hysterectomy. They scraped out whatever other polyps they saw in my pelvis area.

JEANNE BLAKE: Polyps or tumors?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: They are called lesions really. They scraped off whatever they could find and then I went through six months of chemotherapy at the Dana Farber and after that I went into remission for five years. On my fifth anniversary I went into relapse.

JEANNE BLAKE: On your fifth anniversary?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Yes. That's two years ago and I've been fighting the cancer again for the last two years. I haven't been able to get back in remission. I've tried so many

different trials and I'm more excited about what I'm on now than I am than any of the previous medications that I've been on because it's non-invasive and I can.

JEANNE BLAKE: Can you explain what that is?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I would love to. It's a new thing. It's a drug from England and the drug company is Kudos and it's a pap inhibitor and as I mentioned that it is only for BRACA I and BRACA II patients and it's going to be for breast cancer and ovarian cancer patients. What it does is that it's a pill. It's non-toxic, there's no side effects and it's so easy. As you see, I still have my hair. What it does is it goes and repairs your DNA because my DNA is broken. Where you see the lines and you see a DNA, my lines are broken so that the cancer can go right through it. Now it strengthens out my lines in the DNA and it fights the cancer so it's an inhibitor. I've been really excited about this because I've been treated at the City of Hope in California because the Dana Farber doesn't have it yet and I was fortunate again to have a great doctor who said you go where the science is so I shot over to California and in ten weeks my tumor has shrunk 30%.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's such good news.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: It's exciting. Really, really exciting because it's going to be for both of these cancers.

JEANNE BLAKE: How do you, having had a recurrence, did you have symptoms the second time by the way?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I did. This was different. I was constipated this time. To be honest I thought I had food poisoning. Because I kept having very severe stomach pain and it came

on really sudden and like I said again, I was in great shape. I was running six miles a day so I was in great shape and all of a sudden it happened within a week. I had these sharp pains and I called up my doctor and I went in, this was at Dana Farber and my CA 125 which is the blood work showed that there was an elevation in my count so that's when I did a CAT scan and they found another tumor.

JEANNE BLAKE: How psychologically do you maintain now? I imagine it's a bit of a roller coaster but how do you, what are the tricks that you use to keep yourself going?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I surround myself with happy people. I do the things that make me happy, give me joy. I surround myself with positive energy. I have Ovations for the Cure which I founded.

JEANNE BLAKE: Which we'll be talking about.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: It gives me a lot of joy. It's my quest now so it gets me up in the morning. I do work full-time as a property manager. I just love what I do and I love the people that I'm surrounded by. You do have a black cloud hanging over you. You always wonder when? I like to try to say that I live my life in quality instead of quantity. I do everything now. I don't wait for retirement. I don't wait for tomorrow. My husband is very frustrated by it because I'm always saying let's do it now. He's like I was planning next year, and I say, we're going to do it now. You kind of feel like your clock is ticking and so you want to do as much as you can and so I do it and I enjoy my life to the fullest.

JEANNE BLAKE: That would be your best advice to someone who's living with any kind of cancer or anyone who's living?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: I think anybody who gets cancer tends to go that route. First of all they feel their clock is ticking and they don't have a lot of time but I think the ones that are most successful are the ones that take a negative and make it into a positive. I think always being around positive people doing the things that make you happy is a good medicine for you.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let's learn more about Oventions for the Cure the organization that you founded that's helping so many and giving many people hope. We'll talk with the executive director and with Patricia when we come back in a minute.

(Public Service Announcement for OventionsfortheCure.org)

JEANNE BLAKE: We continue our discussion now on About Health about ovarian cancer continuing our conversation with Patricia-Franchi-Flaherty and we're joined by Debbie Soprano who is the executive director of Oventions for the Cure. Patricia you founded the organization how come?

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Well once again, I wanted to take a negative and make a positive. I was tired about not having the word out about ovarian cancer and I was hearing stories about women who were being diagnosed more and more in the latter stages and when I heard about the fact that little money was going toward ovarian cancer it was considered the orphan disease that it kind of got me mad. I said well if I can't count on other people to do it, I might as well do something with my life so that's when I started it.

JEANNE BLAKE: Debra what would you say is, you've had tremendous success in raising funds for researches. Tell us a little bit about how you've done that and where the money's going and sort of the passion behind that?

DEBRA SOPRANO: The passion is Patty's vision and I guess my job and mantra is to actualize that for her and the women that we represent within the ovarian cancer community. I think the most important element that Patty brought to ovarian cancer with Ovations is that she made it a business. We are in the business of saving women's lives with ovarian cancer is really what it comes down to. The two most significant elements that we deal with on a day-to-day basis is raising money for the cutting edge science that's out there which is what Patty herself is experiencing through her experience with the Kudos Carp inhibitor drug and heightening the awareness about the symptoms. It took the gynecologic oncologist 40 years to reach a consensus of the symptoms.

JEANNE BLAKE: And then in June, finally, finally.

DEBRA SOPRANO: They come out with a statement whereby they list four of the symptoms which as you read earlier are very general type symptoms that women especially in their fifties or late forties when they're expecting changes within their bodies and lives and a time when menopause is creeping around the corner you're not quite sure what to expect but you know with grace or hope to receive these changes with some form of grace.

JEANNE BLAKE: Part of your organization's mission is to keep putting out the symptoms because half of your goal is to raise awareness the other half is to support the work in cutting edge research?

DEBRA SOPRANO: That's right. We sent brochures out. We have forty hours dedicated to sending out brochures with the symptoms to every Ob/Gyn office in the country. We're now in eleven states as well as medical facilities and cancer centers. Our circulation is nearing almost 100,000 women that we've reached but we still have a long way to go.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think it's just pounding the message over and over and over again that Patty said that if you feel any one of these symptoms don't say well this is just one of 10,000 other things that it could be but to get it checked. To be proactive and to be in tune with your body.

DEBRA SOPRANO: Yes. Women really need to understand their bodies and be able to advocate for themselves.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Absolutely.

DEBRA SOPRANO: Giving them knowledge is their power so that's what we're hoping to arm them with.

JEANNE BLAKE: My own gynecologist told me the same thing a month ago it's really about knowing your body and knowing those subtle changes that you talked about.

DEBRA SOPRANO: I think generationally that is something that young women are learning more about than we did in our generation, which is really; it's a really great thing. We've come a long way in that regard.

JEANNE BLAKE: Great. We're going to ask one of you to stand by. We're going to be joined by another woman living with cancer and we'll be right back after this short break.

(Public Service Announcement for OvationsfortheCure.org)

JEANNE BLAKE: We continue our conversation now about woman and ovarian cancer and we're joined by Sandy Gradman who is a business owner in Brookline, Massachusetts and also a

woman living with ovarian cancer. Thank you for joining Debra Soprano and me to continue this conversation. You learned fortunately at the very early stages of ovarian cancer that you had the illness. Very unusual. Tell us how you learned.

SANDY GRADMAN: It was really a stroke of luck you could say although my doctor said if you were really lucky you wouldn't have gotten it at all but anyway I was going for my normal yearly PAP smear in October of 2000 and the doctor called me with the results saying that there were some cancer cells and pre-cancer cells and that I should have an appointment with an oncologist which I did and the decision was made for me to have a hysterectomy and no further treatment and that was the way they were going to deal with it.

JEANNE BLAKE: It was based on the fact that he detected that it was ovarian cancer right away?

SANDY GRADMAN: To this day I'm not really sure but it was strange they sent it out and it was difficult to discover. Now I think I know that it did come from there because when I had the hysterectomy I went back for my two-week check up feeling great, wanting to get back to running and all that and then they dropped it that it was on the pathology report from the hysterectomy there were cancer cells near one fallopian tube and an ovary. Therefore it was actually Stage II because it had left the ovary. Now, whether that had traveled down, I'm still not clear on that but that was just a lucky break because had I not known, then two years later I could have had a nice tumor there and become symptomatic or something.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think one of the things that we have to be super careful here of though is that ovarian cancer is not detected through a PAP smear.

SANDY GRADMAN: No. Correct.

JEANNE BLAKE: Did you find out whether you had cervical cancer?

SANDY GRADMAN: It wasn't cervical cancer.

JEANNE BLAKE: You had ovarian cancer and these cells happened to show up in a PAP smear.

SANDY GRADMAN: But they didn't know at the time because it was unusual and as I said I was lucky.

JEANNE BLAKE: Very, very rare and so woman have got to catch this message that a PAP smear will not show ovarian cancer. When my friend Jane died from ovarian cancer when she was diagnosed and never went into remission at all, she was very advanced and people said well have you had a PAP smear? I mean, this was just seven years ago, don't you know it doesn't show up on a PAP smear which points to the important education that you're talking about.

SANDY GRADMAN: That's the key. There is just so much ignorance there and I think for women in particular. Once you start to menstruate, it's commonplace for women to feel bloated and feel fat and have their stomach a little off or something, so it really is something that you live with all of your life which makes it easily dismissible if you go to the doctor with these symptoms.

JEANNE BLAKE: Exactly. You've made it a personal mission to help education about the very things that we're talking about. Tell how you met up with Ovarians for the Cure and with Debra

and then we'll talk about the project that you did together. We decided that we wanted to do something to create more awareness.

JEANNE BLAKE: We meaning you at the studio, the business, the clothing store that you own.

SANDY GRADMAN: It's 28 years of dealing with women and hearing many, many stories and seeing many, many customers come in with cancer before and after treatment and I just became passionate about it. One of our employees was coming in for a long time complaining about all these symptoms of stress and bloating and her clothes didn't fit her anymore and finally she ended up in an emergency room and was diagnosed with Stage III ovarian cancer.

JEANNE BLAKE: This was after you had been treated.

SANDY GRADMAN: Yes. It was irritable bowel syndrome they told her and all that and she didn't insist which I think is a very important. If women know their bodies and know when something is not right, I think it's important to delineate it when they publicly stated the symptoms that they said if they persist for a period of two or three weeks.

JEANNE BLAKE: Two to three weeks?

SANDY GRADMAN: You know when to worry. There's also the denial comes into it. You don't want to face up to it but you make a bee line and insist on getting a C-125.

JEANNE BLAKE: Absolutely.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Sandy, wasn't it one of your customers was a doctor and actually said to her that you need to get tested?

SANDY GRADMAN: Yes, she said you need to go right away. Because she was in terrible distress.

JEANNE BLAKE: So you met Debra and you did this great project that helped bring awareness through an Ad campaign. Tell us about it.

SANDY GRADMAN: Yes. We felt that we wanted to do some kind of message and it turned out to be a full-page Ad in the Boston Globe Magazine section. They were very cooperative and we raised the money for the Ad by appealing to the manufacturers that we dealt with. Our suppliers and vendors and also the reps that we've built up relationships with for a long period of time and the response was great. It was just very, very satisfying.

JEANNE BLAKE: The Ad ran just a few weeks ago. Debra what has been the response? Sandy says it's been great. Tell us how it's made a difference for you.

DEBRA SOPRANO: It really has. With the Ad we also did a TV spot.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: That was very traumatic.

JEANNE BLAKE: Which we've seen during this program.

DEBRA SOPRANO: It's the type when a woman comes forward in the way that Sandy has and shares her story in this way, it's priceless. It really is. To the women that are privately dealing with this

disease and even you. Sandy said that it took her several years before she could personally come forward in this way. It's a very hard association because the statistics of the disease are so grave and because there is no testing and the words like "remission" or "living with the disease" are not typical for this disease. I think what's happening is we've turned a corner with the science and we're able to bring something to the public right now that they've not had before.

JEANNE BLAKE: You are certainly doing a great job of it and I want to thank you Sandy for speaking out in the important work that you are doing. The work that you are doing with Patty is saving lives. Absolutely undeniably and contributing to a cure. We thank you.

PATRICIA FRANCHI-FLAHERTY: Thank you.

SANDY GRADMAN: Thank you.

JEANNE BLAKE: We want to thank you for joining us on this edition of *About Health TV*.
I'm Jeanne Blake and I'll see you next time.