

HEALTH

Cancer patients turn to nature

Breast cancer survivors seek alternatives

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

More and more breast cancer survivors are turning to naturopathic medicine for answers when it comes to addressing the prevention and treatment of the disease.

Speaking at the World Conference on Breast Cancer in Ottawa earlier this month, Richmond Hill naturopath Anca Martalog said women often turn to natural remedies when they have lost hope with medical science.

"I find that women at these conferences are very interested in finding alternatives," said Martalog, who spoke as part of a panel discussion addressing prevention and treatment of breast cancer with naturopathy.

Also on the panel was a naturopath from Switzerland and a woman who had survived breast cancer who used naturopathic treatments in her recovery.

Martalog's presentation addressed the many factors she believes influence the development of breast cancer, including emotional stress, diet and environmental influences.

"There was also a lot of environmental talk," Martalog said.

In fact, other presenters at the conference indicated that environment and lifestyle may partly explain why breast cancer rates are on the rise.

In 1997, there were 900,000 new cases of breast cancer reported worldwide and 400,000 women died. The number of diagnosed cases is expected to hit one million next year.

In Canada, 18,700 new cases will be diagnosed and 5,400 women will die this year. The vast majority of cases occur in women over age 55.

Exposure to PCBs, or polychlorine biphenyls, was shown to cause higher risk and it is believed use of pesticides on lawns and vegetables can also be linked to the development of breast cancer.

But Martalog said internal conflict can also contribute to the disease and while she believes that things like pesticides and pollution may be contributing to the disease, mental well-being and diet must also be considered when trying to address the disease.

"My message was breast cancer is a disease and disorder is part of personal growth which has to be accepted in order to heal. Remedies are all very helpful but it is important to search inside too," she said.

Of the 1,000 women who attended the conference, 30 per cent were diagnosed with breast cancer and the balance were medical professionals and supporters.

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