

Society's Leaders "Paying it forward" for women (and men) with breast cancer.

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Since joining the breast cancer team at the MD Anderson Cancer Center Orlando in October 2011, I have had the honor of caring for over 100 newly diagnosed breast cancer patients and to join in the follow-up care of many more cancer survivors. This column is dedicated to the courageous women and men who have survived breast cancer and to the unsung heroes in our community who have made the cancer journey a little less treacherous and a lot more positive.

In the current economic decline, we are seeing more women unable to follow guidelines for routine mammographic screening for breast cancer. Even more sobering, I have recently cared for many women who have felt a lump or mass in a breast and suspect cancer, but are paralyzed by economic constraints, and do not have an avenue for diagnosis or access to care.

Many patients, when they are diagnosed and are undergoing cytotoxic chemotherapy treatment, do not have the luxury of support from experts who can help them cope with side effects that change their image and can impact their self-esteem, as well as their ability to navigate therapy with an optimal frame of mind. This column features two of the humble heroes in our community making a difference in the cancer journey of breast cancer patients.

Robyn Maynard founded Libby's Legacy in 2007, just a year after she lost her mom, Libby Maynard, to advanced breast cancer. The mission of Libby's Legacy is simplistic and elegant "to provide comprehensive breast health care to the underserved Central Florida community through education, mammograms, follow-up diagnostics and hope coaches on the journey from diagnosis to treatment.



Team Lambert: Laura, Marissa, Shawn, Gary, Anna and Emily

Libby's Legacy also helps stage IV breast cancer patients battling this disease by granting wishes in order to create cherished memories with loved ones through the LIVE BIG program. Not just Surviving... but LIVING!"

Libby's Legacy has teamed with the Women's Center for Radiology to provide free mammogram screening for needy women and to provide diagnostic studies when indicated. Patients suspected of having breast cancer have access to a patient advocate who assists them with navigating the system of imaging, biopsy and access to qualified medical experts throughout our community, including physicians at MD Anderson Cancer Center Orlando and Florida Hospital Cancer Institute. Patient advocates remain at the side of the patient through their treatment and beyond.

The road from suspicion of cancer to proven diagnosis is one of the major gaps in our current healthcare system and Libby's Legacy closes that gap. Once a diagnosis is made, the vast majority of patients qualify for government health insurance, but this insurance does not become activated until there is a proven diagnosis.

In my experience, the second most upsetting news after a patient hears that she (or

he) has cancer is getting the news that they will experience hair loss due to the effects of chemotherapy. It feels like the final insult to many patients. Gary Lambert and his amazing team at Gary Lambert Salon in Winter Park have been offering complimentary care to patients facing chemotherapy induced hair loss and other cosmetic effects of cancer treatment for over 20 years.

As owner of one of the most successful hair salons in Central Florida, Gary stands by his commitment to patients, often changing his busy schedule to accommodate a newly diagnosed patient. Plus, patients benefit from his positive attitude, his 20-plus years of accumulated experience and his infectious laughter — definite positive therapy.

My Personal Prescription:

1. Find out more about Libby's Legacy at libbyslegacy.org and consider a donation to this worthy charity.
2. When you see Gary Lambert at one of the many charitable and society events he supports, tell him "Thank you for paying it forward to cancer survivors!"