



# Getting through **BREAST CANCER** with integrative care

By Lesa Knollenberg

**“Y**ou have cancer.” The moment women hear those words from their doctor, life changes. There are a hundred questions, reasons to feel guilty and even more uncertainties.

*“What will I do now?”*

*“How did this happen?”*

*“I should have thrown out that non-stick pan.”*

*“I shouldn’t have eaten those pre-cut baby carrots.”*

*“I should have done my breast self-exams more carefully.”*

All of the Internet horror stories and dark

fears that have flown away come home and settle in. The medical information presented to a new cancer patient is staggering, regardless of the type of cancer, and it’s common to look at your provider and say “just tell me what to do!”

Enter Dr. Lucille Marchand, MD, clinical director of Integra-



**Dr. Lucille Marchand**

UW Paul P. Carbone Care Center

tive Oncology Services, UW Paul P. Carbone Care Center in Madison. “I help people walk through their fear and anxiety to enable them to make the best decisions possible. I help them increase their options of care and decrease side effects of conventional therapy.”

Integrative oncology focuses on educational and support services that combine psychological, nutritional, spiritual and complementary approaches to health and healing for patients with cancer. A breast cancer patient, for example, may start her chemotherapy regimen. She understands the goal and side effects of the treatment. But



Gilda's Club Madison offers support groups for those touched by cancer.

Photo provided by Gilda's Club Madison

how to quell her fears and shore up her family as she goes through her chemo? Should she exercise? What should she eat to maximize her recovery? These are all issues that Marchand addresses. She understands and bridges conventional, alternative and complementary medicines.

Most cancer patients will tell you that the medical aspect of their diagnosis is a small part of their struggle. The world as they knew it stops, and life is divided between *before cancer* and *after cancer*. The physical, spiritual, social and emotional ramifications of a life after cancer are confounding. As director of Integrative Oncology, Marchand's goal is to help patients achieve their highest level of wellbeing.

Before positions such as Marchand's existed, patients sought out information on their own. Cancer patients often used alternative therapies, but didn't tell their doctors because it wasn't well-received. It is now understood that alternative and complementary treatments can be beneficial to traditional treatment. As such, integrative practitioners often focus on botanical and natural products, nutrition, exercise, acupuncture, massage and

mind-body therapies. Conventional medicine practitioners are aware of the benefit of a combined approach, and most major cancer centers now have integrative oncology departments.

Studies have shown that most women diagnosed with breast cancer will integrate traditional, alternative and complementary treatments on their own. This, however, can be dangerous. "When first diagnosed, patients are overwhelmed with information. I help them sift through the information and help them choose therapies which don't interfere with conventional treatments and are not harmful," says Marchand. "For example, some supplements and botanicals might interfere with chemotherapy and radiation."

#### Finding community

Studies have also shown that individuals with strong support systems navigate the twists of cancer more easily than those who attempt it alone. Gilda's Club Madison is an organization that provides support to people of all ages who have been touched by cancer. The 23 affiliates are named in honor of comedian Gilda Radner, who chronicled her

cancer journey in her book *It's Always Something*. A cancer patient — and his or her family members — can spend time at Gilda's Club and join support groups, participate in creative workshops, author readings, lectures such as "Being an Advocate," or just have fun among caring members and staff.

"We provide a sense of community," says Debra Noell, LCSW, ACSW, program director for Gilda's Club Madison. "There are people here who understand what you're going through, and there is tremendous power in that. I see it here every day."




**Debra Noell**  
Gilda's Club  
Madison



Lesa Knollenberg is a local freelance writer who is a big fan of Gilda Radner.

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