



# PATHWAYS

## A Study of Breast Cancer Survivorship

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

SPRING 2009

### Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies by Participants in the Pathways Study

by Heather Greenlee, ND, PhD and Marilyn Kwan, PhD



Heather Greenlee



Marilyn Kwan

Many women use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies with the goal of improving their health, treating a specific condition, or preventing disease. Furthermore, many women with breast cancer want to know, in addition to conventional therapies, what proactive steps they can take to positively impact their prognosis after diagnosis, including changing their lifestyle and using CAM. Lifestyle changes encompass nutrition and physical activity, and CAM includes pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic therapies (see table for examples). CAM use by women with breast cancer has been increasing over time, yet little is known

about how lifestyle factors and CAM use after diagnosis can influence prognosis.

Pathways Study participants are also frequent users of CAM, as Pathways Study investigators have recently reported in a paper published in the journal *Breast Cancer Research and Treatment* [1]. In the paper, CAM therapies used before and after breast cancer diagnosis by the first 1000 Pathways participants was described. This information can improve understanding of patterns and motivations of CAM use, as well as identify CAM practices that may affect cancer-related prognosis, quality of life, and adherence to breast cancer treatment.

Most (96.5%) Pathways participants reported a history of using at least one form of CAM, and 57.3% reported ever using four or more of the general CAM modalities. Each of the five general CAM modalities (botanicals, other natural products, special diets, mind-body healing, body/energy/other treatments) was used by 63-75% of participants at least once in their lives.

In the five years before diagnosis, specific CAM therapies used at least weekly by more than 20% of women included green tea, glucosamine, omega-3 fatty acids, prayer and religion.

In the average two-month period right after diagnosis and before study enrollment, CAM use was high (86.1% of participants); 47.5% used botanical supplements, 47.2% used other natural products, 28.8% used special diets, 64.2% used mind-body healing, and 26.5% used body/energy/other treatments.

In general, frequent use of each CAM modality before and after diagnosis was associated with use of other CAM modalities and other healthy behaviors (i.e., high fruit/vegetable intake, lower body mass index).

These Pathways Study findings show that CAM use before and after breast cancer diagnosis is common in this diverse group of women. Breast cancer survivors should discuss their use of CAM, especially dietary supplements, with their physicians.

| Pharmacologic CAM                                                                                                                 | Non-pharmacologic CAM                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Botanical Supplements</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ black cohosh</li><li>▪ ginseng</li><li>▪ mistletoe</li></ul> | <u>Mind-Body Healing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ hypnosis</li><li>▪ support groups</li><li>▪ yoga</li></ul>                               |
| <u>Other Natural Products</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ co-enzyme Q10</li><li>▪ DHEA</li><li>▪ melatonin</li></ul>  | <u>Body-based, Energy-based, and Other Treatments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ acupuncture</li><li>▪ naturopathy</li><li>▪ Reiki</li></ul> |
| <u>Special Diets</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ low-fat</li><li>▪ macrobiotic</li><li>▪ vegan</li></ul>              |                                                                                                                                                           |

Continued on Page 3

## FACES OF PATHWAYS



### **VIRGINIA POZO**

is one of our Spanish speaking interviewers for Marin County and the Peninsula. She moved from Costa Rica to North Beach five years ago when she married a

native Oregonian. Since then, she has learned the art of weaving and enjoys camping and skiing.



### **JANET THIESSEN**

has been interviewing participants in Sonoma and Napa County. A native of Marin County, she is an active birder and a lover of shorelines,

marshes, bogs, and swamps. She is also a breast cancer survivor.

### **SANDRA WOLTER**

lives in Vallejo and interviews women in Solano, Contra Costa, and North Alameda Counties. Sandra graduated from Ohio State University where she played field hockey, basketball, and tennis. She moved to California in 1987 after spending 6 months in India where she studied Yoga.



### **ALLEGRA TIMPERI**

Allegra is Pathways' newest research assistant. She moved from Boston to San Francisco this past October, and has been spending her free time getting to know the Bay Area. In particular, Allegra is enjoying the gorgeous hikes and the great art museums. ✕



## Follow-up Questionnaires: For You and Others Too

*By Julie Munneke*

*Pathways Study Field Staff Manager*

The Pathways Study asks for follow-up information from all participants at six month, 12 month and 24 month intervals from the time of your first interview. As some of you have experienced already, you will receive a packet in the mail at six months and again at 24 months containing materials like those used by your Pathways interviewer during your original in-person interview. At 12 months you will receive a follow-up telephone call from study staff.

Our study goals and questions build upon knowledge gained in earlier breast cancer studies done at Kaiser Permanente and other institutions around the world. In turn, our Pathways study already has and will continue to contribute our own discoveries to the growing body of knowledge about breast cancer survival and lifestyle factors. The more our participants continue to participate in the follow-up, the more valuable our results and research become to the medical community.

Studies that follow participants are not done as frequently as studies that only contact a participant once. Thus, not as much is known about the

changes and challenges you face as you continue your journey as a breast cancer survivor. Your continued participation is important not only to



other breast cancer survivors but to all women. We know that you are busy, and we hope that you will view your continuing participation as a form of community service that will contribute to the important and growing body of knowledge about breast cancer and factors that influence survival. Each person and every question you answer counts! In the words of Maya Angelou, "When you do nothing, you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved, you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better." Thanks so much for joining our study and continuing to participate. ✕



## Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies by Participants in the Pathways Study Continued from page 1



To our knowledge, the Pathways Study is the first prospective cohort study to comprehensively collect CAM use information from women around the time of breast cancer diagnosis, including use immediately after diagnosis. Follow-

up questionnaires are being administered to collect information on how CAM use may change as a woman moves through treatment and enters into follow-up care. In the future we will examine how CAM use affects treatment-related side effects, recurrence, and survival. Investigators also plan to study the effects of using some controversial dietary supplements, including antioxidants and soy isoflavones, after a breast cancer diagnosis and during treatment. The Pathways Study is one of the first studies designed to examine factors associated with frequent CAM use, as frequent use may have the most impact on a breast cancer survivor's prognosis and quality of life.

Thank you to all of the study participants who have taken the time to fill out the Pathways Study CAM questionnaires! We encourage all participants to continue being an integral part of Pathways



by providing information during our follow-up questionnaires.

If you would like a copy of the CAM paper, please visit our study website ([www.dor.kaiser.org/studies/pathways](http://www.dor.kaiser.org/studies/pathways)) or contact the Pathways Study Coordinating Center at 1-866-206-2979.

## Pathways Update – Who Is Participating?

We are grateful for your role in Pathways. All of you add meaning and diversity to our study, and contribute your unique perspective to the information we are gathering. Thank you for participating.

**As of April 2009  
the total enrollment  
is 2,547 women**

**Already, 2,182 women  
have reached the  
6 month interval**

**1,373 women have been  
interviewed for the  
1 year interval**

**842 packets have  
been mailed for the  
24 month interval**

## New Contact Information?

In order to keep in touch with you, we need your latest contact information. Please let us know if you have changed your contact information, including your phone number and home address. You can reach us by calling our toll-free number **1-866-206-2979**.

[1] Greenlee H, Kwan ML, Ergas IJ, Sherman KJ, Krathwohl SE, Bonnell C, Lee MM, Kushi LH. Complementary and alternative therapy use before and after breast cancer diagnosis: The Pathways Study. *Breast Cancer Res Treat*, e-published January 31, 2009. ☒



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**  
Division of Research / Pathways Study  
2000 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612

