

Breast Cancer Collaborative Begins

We've come a long way. Marin County is now host to some of the most innovative and important research around to look at why we have one of the highest breast cancer incidence rates in the world.

While this is exciting news, one of the challenges we face is how best to work together and share information as individual research projects move forward.

In November, representatives from Marin Breast Cancer Watch, the County Department of Health and Human Services, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, UCSF, UC Berkeley School of Public Health and other scientists and community leaders came together at the Marin Headlands to answer this challenge.

The result is the Marin Breast Cancer Research Collaborative, which represents all interested parties, from individual researchers to community members, coming together to share and combine their expertise and knowledge.

In addition to creating the Collaborative, the day-long retreat helped everyone better understand the work being done and the projects underway. More important, it helped identify areas where collaboration and sharing could enhance the research and help the community better understand the studies.

Presentations were made by team leaders of each study that outlined the project goals and the activities underway to meet those goals. This was followed by discussion on how to strengthen the work being done and help learn from each other.

Here's a look at the projects underway:

- **Surveillance and Analysis of Marin County Breast Cancer Incidence Rates**
- **Traditional Risk Factor Study** – This study will attempt to describe female breast cancer risk factor distributions in

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MBCW Board members join with other county and health experts to collaborate at a retreat held in the Marin Headlands.

MBCW Year End Report

Janice Marie Barlow, Interim Executive Director

The past year saw much change for Marin Breast Cancer Watch. Sadly, our founder and visionary, Francine Levien, passed away. While this was a great loss to us all, we can take heart knowing that each and every day she is with us as we work to find answers to the many questions we all have about the high incidence rate of breast cancer in Marin.

To help answer these questions, we've continued to grow and evolve as an organization, from pursuing new research projects, to forging new partnerships in the community, to looking at new ways to involve our friends and neighbors in the important work we do. In just six short years, we've become the only breast cancer organization in Marin committed to:

- Increasing public awareness and understanding of Marin's high incidence of breast cancer and the impact of breast cancer on women, their families and friends and our community.
- Moving beyond simply promoting breast cancer awareness to actively seeking the causes for the high incidence of breast cancer in Marin.

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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Year End Report

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- Promoting and conducting community-based research, which means scientists and members of the community are involved in all phases of the research and have a voice in the process.
- Exploring the environmental links to breast cancer through community research and educational forums.
- Giving a voice to women with breast cancer who are dedicated to finding ways to prevent this disease from even occurring and to understanding why it does occur at such high rates in our community.

We are proud of the work we've done. What started simply as a group of concerned women in our community has evolved into a successful model for community-based research, education and action. Here is a look at our accomplishments for 2001:

RESEARCH

We significantly increased the number of community-based research projects, including the Marin Environmental Study, which will collect existing information into a database that can be used to explore the environmental links to breast cancer. Most important, MBCW is a leading voice in research being conducted right here in Marin.

COMMUNITY

As an organization, MBCW reached more people in the community than ever before. In collaboration with Bay Area and local breast cancer, environmental and women's health organizations, as well as many local businesses and elected officials, we worked with the County Board of Supervisors to proclaim October "Stop Cancer Where It Starts: Beyond Breast Cancer Awareness Month." Throughout the month, we ran full page ads in the Marin Independent Journal putting a face on breast cancer and demonstrating the impact the disease has on families, friends, and the entire community.

PARTNERSHIPS

Along with UCSF, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the Marin County Health Department, MBCW is part of the Marin Breast Cancer Research Collaborative. These partnerships provide the Marin community with access to highly-skilled breast cancer researchers who will share data and ideas about the many research projects underway in Marin. This will not only help the community, but also help leverage important resources to have the greatest impact.

EDUCATION

Keeping Abreast, our quarterly newsletter, continues to be a resource for many that provides cutting-edge information on breast cancer research, the efforts of the organization and issues affecting our entire community.

EVENTS

More and more people were informed about the important work being done by MBCW through our many community events. From the successful Honor Thy Healer ceremony last spring to house parties and theater functions, the Marin community continues to get involved and support MBCW.

ORGANIZATION

One of the biggest changes of the year is an expanded staff to help strengthen our influence and achieve our mission. We now have a greater ability to accomplish our goals and reach more people in the community. And our Board involvement is as strong as ever, with members showing leadership in many areas, including being selected to serve on national committees.

These achievements happened because of the broad support we have in our community. Many extraordinary people – women with breast cancer, members of the board, staff, scientists, public leaders and community members – volunteered time and resources to help us achieve our mission. We are a grassroots organization, and that is reflected by all the people who worked together to help lay the foundation for MBCW to help find the causes and stop the epidemic of breast cancer.

A LOOK AHEAD TO 2002

The coming year will present many challenges for us as an organization. We are still trying to understand how September 11 and the current economic situation will affect our ability to raise the funds we need to meet our mission and achieve our goals. At the same time, we are excited to finally release the findings of our first research project – the Adolescent Risk Factors Study – in the spring.

Even with all these changes, our mission and our goals remain clear. This is our commitment for 2002:

- We will continue to pursue research projects that will help us better understand the possible link between environmental causes and breast cancer.
- We will work to reach a more diverse population in hopes of educating and informing more people about our work and organization.
- We will build new partnerships and relationships in the community to help us reach our goals.
- We will share our findings and educate the community.
- And we will not stop working until we have answers to all the questions we ask.

We've made progress, but the challenges continue to be great. We're really just at the beginning of our journey. But we know that together we can make a difference.

ELECTRICAL AND MAGNETIC FIELDS CAN CAUSE CANCER

Libby Kelley, CWTI

The World Health Organization (WHO) and other credible sources now officially recognize links between EMFs and cancer, including breast cancer. Yet, potentially hazardous EMF exposures occur in our daily environment and cannot always be avoided. A public policy response is clearly indicated, and policy decision-makers need to be strongly urged to strengthen government oversight and regulation of power lines and appliances. With the advent of a major restructuring of an aging U.S. electrical power delivery system, this is the right moment to evaluate potential EMF hazards. It is much easier and less costly to install new and safer technology if we insist on it beforehand.

Here is what the experts say: The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), announced in June that extremely low frequency (ELF) magnetic fields can cause cancer in humans, based on a weak association between residential EMF exposure and childhood leukemia (see <http://monographs.iarc.fr>). On October 2, after reviewing the IARC report, the World Health Organization endorsed the concept of "prudent avoidance" for the first time, in advising that decisions on power lines should "consider ways to reduce people's exposures, and that governments and industry should offer the public suggestions for safe and low-cost ways to reduce exposures (WHO fact sheet no. 263 at www.who.int/inf/fs/fact263.html). In April, the California State Health Department EMF Program issued a draft report on electrical and magnetic fields and health, and made the statement that "there is a 10-50 percent risk that exposure to EMFs at home or work could add slightly to an individual woman's risk of contracting breast cancer." The report continues, "if EMFs really contribute to this condition, even a slight additional lifetime risk could be of concern to regulators who already regulate over environmental hazards that convey even lower risks (see www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/deodc/ehib/).

The September issue of the American Public Health Association Journal (Vol. 91, No. 9) included an article entitled "The Precautionary Principle and Electrical and Magnetic Fields" by Jamieson and Wartenberg, who refer to such findings and call for a public policy response based on the precautionary principle, simply defined as "it is better to be safe than sorry." They criticize the current environmental regulatory framework as representing "a paternalistic policy more concerned to avoid false positives than false negatives, limiting opportunities for individuals to make choices between risk-taking alternatives." In October, the Journal of the National Cancer Research

Center in Seattle showed that women who work at night might increase breast cancer risk by up to 60 percent (see www.jnci.oupjournals.org) due to hormonal changes caused by bright lights at night, which reduce melatonin and increase estrogen levels. Based on these expert opinions and scientific studies, personal risk avoidance and advocating more protective policies related to power lines and appliances are realistic preventive health strategies.

Libby Kelly, Council on Wireless Technology Impacts, www.senergyfields.org

ACCEPTING HONOR THY HEALER AWARD NOMINATIONS

Do you know of a professional who has assisted women with breast cancer through their healing process?

Are you familiar with someone who has played a pivotal role in helping a friend or family member in their battle against breast cancer?

We want to hear from you!

Please nominate this person for an Honor Thy Healer Award and give us the chance to recognize them at our annual celebration on May 4, 2002.

HEALING PROFESSIONAL

Healing Professional nominees can range from physicians and nurses to social workers, hospice workers, and acupuncturists—there are no set guidelines.

HEALING PARTNER

Healing Partner nominees can be anyone who has helped a loved one through their fight against this disease.

HOW TO NOMINATE

Write a description (up to 250 words) of the nominee's endeavors, accomplishments and attributes and send it into us by Friday, February 22, 2002.

Nominations can be emailed to cassies@breastcancerwatch.org, faxed to 415.256.9773, or mailed to 25 Bellam Blvd, Suite 260, San Rafael, CA 94901. Questions? Please call Cassie Stevenson at 415.256.9011, ext. 103.

RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

Janice Marie Barlow, Interim Executive Director

Light at Night Exposure and Breast Cancer Risk—The Melatonin Hypothesis

The results of a new study from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center add to a growing body of literature supporting the hypothesis that exposure to light at night may be a potential risk factor of breast cancer. (1).

The study involved 813 women aged 20 to 74 years, diagnosed with breast cancer from November 1992 through March 1995 and 793 women without breast cancer. An in-person interview was used to gather information on sleep habits and bedroom lighting in the 10 years prior to diagnosis of breast cancer. In addition, a lifetime occupational history was taken.

Questions on sleep habits included the following: 1) the time the women usually turned off the lights to go to sleep and time she woke up; 2) the usual number of times her sleep was interrupted; 3) when sleep was interrupted whether a light was turned on and for how long; and 4) the ambient light level in the bedroom while sleeping. The lifetime occupational history included information on the percentage of time worked at day, evening, or graveyard shift.

Scott Davis, PhD, and colleagues found that women who worked the graveyard shift at least once during the decade before breast cancer diagnosis were at approximately 60% increased risk for breast cancer compared to those who did not work the graveyard shift. In addition, the risk of breast cancer significantly increased with each additional hour per week of graveyard-shift work.

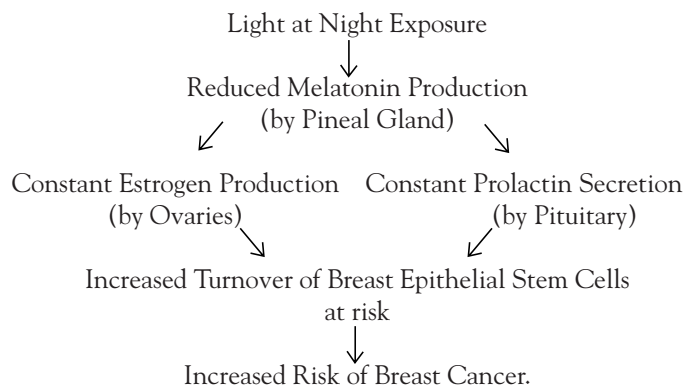
Furthermore, the researchers found that independent of shift-work status, women who frequently do not sleep during the period of the night when melatonin levels are highest (defined to be between 1:00 am and 2:00 am) have a 14% increase in breast cancer risk for each night per week of wakefulness during this crucial period.

This study is important for several reasons:

- It is the first population-based study that examines the relationship between breast cancer risk and exposure to light at night as determined by sleep habits, bedroom lighting and graveyard-shift work.
- No occupational exposures with known or potential carcinogenicity are as common as work at night.
- Light at night exposure is a potentially modifiable environmental risk factor of breast cancer.

The scientific rationale behind light at night exposure and

increased breast cancer risk is linked to the synthesis and release of melatonin. Melatonin is a powerful hormone produced at night that affects the production of other hormones in the body, including estrogen. The proposed mechanism of affect is:



Our understanding about the basic biology of melatonin in humans and how differences in the concentrations and patterns of this hormone affect health is limited. The editorial accompanying the publication of the study states “there is an urgent need for further exploration of the relationship between exposure to light at night, shift work, including timing during the night and cancers that may be influenced by melatonin.” As an organization, we will continue to monitor any new developments in this important area and report the findings.

References:

Journal of Cancer Institute 2001, October 17: 93(20): pages 1557-1562.

New Evidence Shows Nipple Aspirates Might Predict Breast Cancer Risk

One of the many challenges in the field of breast cancer detection is the lack of a safe and accurate method for screening women. Many women are concerned about the risks of repeated exposure to radiation through yearly mammography and would prefer a screening method that does not carry such risks. The limited predictive value of routine screening mammography in women ages 35 to 50 highlights the need to develop additional screening and preventive strategies for this particular age group.

One future technique for obtaining information about the status of women’s breasts may be nipple aspiration of breast fluid, a simple, non-invasive way of obtaining fluid from the breasts of women who are neither pregnant nor lactating. The fluid is obtained by use of a manual breast pump that mimics

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the suction force of a nursing infant. The fluid is then sent to the lab either for cytological evaluation (examination of cells for evidence of abnormality) or biochemical markers that might indicate risk for malignancy.

A recent study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute (www.jnci.oupjournals.org) and first authored by Margaret R. Wensch, an epidemiologist at the UCSF School of Medicine and a co-principle investigator on two Marin Breast Cancer Watch studies, provides additional evidence that abnormal cells in breast fluid might predict risk for breast cancer.

Wensch and her colleagues attempted collection of nipple aspirate from 7,673 women in the San Francisco Bay Area during the period of 1972 through 1991, classified the women into three main categories: women with abnormal cells in breast fluid (15.2 % of study women), women with only normal cells in breast fluid (38.1% of study women) and women from whom breast fluid was not obtained (40.2% % of study women. In 7% of women fluid was produced but was unsatisfactory for evaluation) and determined breast cancer incidence.

The researchers found that women whose breast fluid contained abnormal cells had a two-fold increased risk of developing breast cancer compared to women from whom fluid could not be obtained. Among the women with abnormal cells in breast fluid, 8.5% later developed breast cancer, compared to 3.7% of those women who produced no fluids. Among women whose breast fluid contained only normal cells, about 6.6% developed breast cancer.

In addition, the study found that women with normal nipple aspirate fluid had a 20% to 60% increase in breast cancer compared to women who produced no fluids. The presence of breast fluid itself may, according to Wensch and her colleagues, be an indication of increased risk of breast cancer, but many factors determine whether or not fluid could be obtained.

Wensch concluded that the results of the study suggest that an analysis of breast fluid should be considered for inclusion on the list of factors (such as close family history, age and the results of previous physical examinations and biopsies) used when predicting a woman's breast cancer risk.

At this time the technique of nipple aspirate fluid is most promising as an additional tool for evaluating high-risk women, particularly women younger than 55 in whom breast fluid is most readily produced. There is a need, however, according to Wensch, for clinical investigators to find additional applications for this easy-to-perform, safe, and non-invasive procedure.

In an effort to build upon this growing body of research, Marin Breast Cancer Watch applied for and received a \$5,000 grant from the Susan Love MD Breast Cancer Foundation to incorporate collection of nipple aspirate fluid in a pilot study investigating the influence of selected personal environmental exposures on female breast cancer risk.

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MBCW IN THE COMMUNITY

Marin Breast Cancer Watch continues to be out in the community, hosting events, making new friends, and educating people about our important research.

PASTA POMODORO

October kicked off with a fundraiser at Pasta Pomodoro in Mill Valley that raised more than \$2,000 for the organization. In honor of the one year anniversary of this location, Pasta Pomodoro agreed to host the event. Many who were unfamiliar with MBCW attended and learned more about our efforts.

KATE CLINTON



Early November was marked by a performance by political humorist Kate Clinton at the Osher Marin JCC. Sponsored by Fireman's Fund, in association with the JCC, MBCW sold 32 tickets and raised more than \$1,100. This was quite a feat considering the event was the same night as game seven of the most exciting World Series in recent memory! In the photo above (from left to right) are MBCW's Janice Barlow, Kate Clinton, and Jeanne Rizzo and Andrea Martin of the Breast Cancer Fund.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Hal Brown, President of the Marin County Board of Supervisors and a long-time MBCW supporter, hosted a party at his San Anselmo home in mid-November for the organization. Local community and business leaders were invited to learn more about MBCW and meet our board of directors. Many new relationships were formed and we thank Hal for his generous support.

HONOR THY HEALER VOLUNTEERS WANTED

MBCW staff is scouting for volunteers for the third annual Honor Thy Healer Celebration on Saturday, May 4, 2002. Once again, it will be held at Fireman's Fund in Novato. We need people to help with everything. Call Cassie at 256.9011, ext. 103.

THE SPIRIT OF MARY GOULD

Roni Peskin-Mentzer

One evening during a scheduled meeting of my breast cancer support group, a young woman entered the room with a bandage covering a chemotherapy-induced injury on her arm. While sharing her story, she often paused to sob quietly. She was first diagnosed with breast cancer at age 32 when she had undergone a mastectomy. Mary's doctors assured her that she did not need chemotherapy. Eight years later and several months after the birth of her son, Michael, she discovered a lump on her sternum. The members of the group were deeply disturbed.



Mary Elizabeth Gould Doerr
Sept. 16, 1952-Nov. 4, 2001

Two years later we attended a meeting of the fledging organization, Marin Breast Cancer Watch, which was encouraging women to become breast cancer activists. Mary, now a member of its Board of Directors, greeted us with her fabulous smile and beautiful blue eyes. The last two years had been difficult for her. She had endured a bone marrow transplant and personal family difficulties, but now her breast cancer was again in remission.

Mary Gould was a full time mother, a professional physical therapist and the treasurer of MBCW where she worked non-stop to file the many government forms needed to make MBCW a nonprofit organization. She was determined to discover the cause of Marin's high incidence of breast cancer. She joined Georgie Farren, Flavia Belli, and me in the long process of designing a breast cancer research study of the women of Marin County. She volunteered to find an epidemiologist to work on the project although one after another professional epidemiologist refused to talk with her. Finally Margaret Wrensch of UCSF agreed to work with us and our Adolescent Study was born. A small group of women met every week for 18 months to plan the study. Mary brought us fresh flowers, small gifts, delicious food, and never forgot to acknowledge a birthday. She searched the literature to find creative ways to formulate the complicated questions that needed to be asked at the interviews. She also found Linda Spence, an author who became another great addition to our team.

Two years ago, Mary was again diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. She did not mention her diagnosis until she became too sick to work with us. She chose not to have aggressive treatment and instead spent time planning for

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MARIN BEYOND PESTICIDES— SENSITIVE ZONES



Ginger Souders Mason

People in San Luis Obispo County who are concerned about state mandated aerial spraying of toxic pesticides if the glassy-winged sharpshooter is discovered in their community, are using a little recognized twist in the state agricultural code to find protection. Section 6428 (c) states that in agricultural areas the use of certain restricted materials that might adversely affect such places as hospitals, schools and playgrounds, residential areas, parks, lakes, waterways, estuaries and reservoirs, wildlife management areas as critical habitats of rare, endangered or threatened species livestock and crops must be identified. A map or aerial photograph may be used for designating such areas and they are labeled "sensitive zones." Shouldn't women undergoing chemotherapy be similarly considered sensitive if caught in the aerial spray? Wouldn't their health be severely impacted?

To be placed on a registry, the people in San Luis Obispo County call their Agricultural Commissioner. The people of Marin Beyond Pesticides Coalition are working with the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner to see if a similar registry can be started in Marin. We would hope this could also trigger notification if a neighbor contracted to have extensive tree canopy, lawn or home spraying.

Though scientific studies of human populations have indicated only a few pesticide chemicals as being directly linked to cancers or health problems, animal studies tell a different story. The question remains, do we have to pile up the dead bodies before we have absolute proof of a causal relationship, or can we invoke the precautionary principle and avoid exposure through public demand for sensitive zones? If you feel this is a reasonable approach and you are chemically-sensitive, are undergoing chemotherapy, have small children, are elderly, have an organic garden, or live next to an impacted stream then call Stacy Carlson, Marin's Agricultural Commissioner, and request your name and location be put on his map/list, 415/499-6700). To live in a clean environment should be the right of every citizen. For more information about Marin Beyond Pesticides call 415/459-1391.

MBCW's New Year Wish List:

Metal files

Digital camera

Scanner

Projector for Power Point presentations

Volunteers for Honor Thy Healer 2002

(see page 3 for more information).

Many Thanks

MBCW would like to extend its warmest thanks to the following people and organizations:

- Pat Skipper and the families of St. Patrick School for donating to MBCW in memory of their friend Elizabeth Howely;
- Wildwood Natural Foods for donating a percentage of their organic soy milk sales to MBCW,
- Stapleton School of Ballet for donating \$1 of every Nutcracker performance ticket sold.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the individual donors (and community businesses) listed on the donations insert in this issue of *Keeping Abreast*. There were simply too many to squeeze into these pages! Thank you everyone. Your generosity is deeply appreciated and will be put to good use.



Calendar of Events

MBCW Volunteer Thank you Party
 Tuesday, January 15th, 2002
 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm
 205 Margarita Drive,
 San Rafael, CA

Breast Cancer and New Technology
 Francine Halberg, MD
 Tuesday, January 15, 2002
 7:00 pm
 Marin General Hospital

**State Assembly Select Committee on Cancer
 Detection, Prevention and Research**
 Chaired by Assemblyman Joe Nation
 "Incidence of Cancer:
 Is it higher in Marin County?"
 Friday, February 1, 2002
 Marin Civic Center,
 Supervisors' Chambers
 9:30 am to 11:30 am
 Call Leslie Crouse to RSVP:
 415/479-4920

Marin Breast Cancer Watch Mission Statement:

Breast Cancer Watch of Marin is a grassroots organization dedicated to finding the causes and stopping the epidemic of breast cancer. We accomplish our mission through community-based research, education and public policy advocacy with a focus on creating a healthy environment.

Founder:

Francine Levien

Board Members:

Roni Peskin Mentzer,
 President; Flavia Belli, Vice
 President; Lucy Rezendes,
 Treasurer; Linda Spence,
 Secretary; Andrea Fox,
 Georgie Farren,
 Fern Orenstein, Ginger
 Souders-Mason, Joanne
 Williams and Katie
 Beacock.

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Marin County Study of Adolescent Risk Factors

(415) 256-9109

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 Tom Scott:
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Edare Carroll, Editor
 Cynthia Hardin, Assistant
 Editor, Brian Narelle,
 Cartoonist

Thanks are extended to the following contributors to this issue: Ginger Souders-Mason, Janice Marie Barlow, Libby Kelley and Lynne Perry

Farewell to Mary Gould

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her family's future. She sold her house in Ross and moved to Fort Bragg. She was told that she only had six months to live, but her strong will kept her alive longer. She made a new home for her family surrounded by gardens blooming with the rose bushes she loved. She spent her last few months with her devoted husband and son.

When we last visited Mary she was so pleased that the work that she had begun was reaching fruition. Although she was weak and walked with a cane her spirit was bright and youthful. In May, when MBCW's founder Francine Levien died, Mary found the strength to come to the memorial and pay her respects to her old friend. After fighting fearlessly for many years, Mary finally succumbed to breast cancer in November. Her strength, goodness and determination were part of her beautiful spirit. She has left a legacy for her son and for the women who knew and loved her. I just wish we could have had her with us longer.

Nipple Aspirate Study

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The Susan Love MD Breast Cancer Foundation project will evaluate the feasibility and success of collecting nipple aspirate fluid in the context of a population-based interview study. In addition to the various aspects of nipple aspirate cytology currently under investigation at UCSF, the study will investigate the possibility of measuring gene expressions and gene-environment interactions. Marin Breast Cancer Watch is partnering and collaborating with epidemiologists from UCSF (Dr. Margaret Wrensch) and LBL (Dr. Chris Erdmann) on this study.

Breast Cancer Collaborative Begins

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Marin County and compare them with those of other California counties and the state when possible.

- **Marin Residence Study** – This project will look at the question of whether living in Marin County is a breast cancer risk factor.
- **Marin Environmental Data Study** – Being led by MBCW, this project will compile existing environmental information into a database that can be used to identify future research projects. The Marin community is being asked to share experiences and information to help build the database.
- **Personal Environmental Risk Factor Study** – This MBCW community-based research project will look at the relationship between breast cancer risk and exposure to selected personal environmental risk factors such as home and workplace exposures, food, personal care products, etc.
- **Breast Cancer Research Information Exchange** – The purpose of this MBCW project is to facilitate information and research findings between researchers and community members. The exchange will occur through the Collaborative as well as through town hall meetings, workshops and other educational programs.

Clearly we are lucky to have so many projects underway that attempt to use the knowledge of the community and help answer the questions we all have about Marin's high incidence rate. The Collaborative will help facilitate communication and provide a way for researchers and the community to tap into the vast knowledge and information base available. MBCW is pleased to be part of this effort and will be asking the community for information and input to move the research project forward. Working together, we can help ensure the best possible success for all of our hard work.



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