

LADY OF THE LAMP

By Pauline Shesnicky
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During my first “go round” with breast cancer in 1991, facing chemo and radiation, I was terrified and feeling helpless - pretty standard for a new cancer patient. Staff at the cancer centre recommended that I attend an orientation session at Amethyst House. It was there that I met my hero, oncology nurse Pat Henderson. She and Dr. Scott Sellick had set up a teaching program to provide cancer patients with information about treatment, side effects and techniques to minimize discomfort. The session let me know what to expect and how to make the best of the situation. I began to feel that I had some control and, most important, that I wasn't alone. Right then I joined Pat's fan club. She has a way of making her patients feel cared for and supported. In fact, I am not the only one who has written to tell the world about Thunder Bay's Florence Nightingale (The Lady of the Lamp). There have been many other grateful patients to spread the word. This is not surprising since, in Pat's words, her “greatest pleasure is working with patients and family”, and it shows.

The *Chemotherapy Information Class* still exists for new patients at the cancer centre. Pat has also presented her teaching program outside of Thunder Bay. After presenting to an international conference of oncology professionals in BC, she was asked by a delegation of nurses if they could use her program at home in China.

When asked, Pat declares that her greatest work achievement has been her involvement in the production of a video “To Be or Not To Be Fatigued”. The 18 minute video was a result of collaboration between Pat, Dr. Dimitrios Vergidis, Dr. Sellick, Penny Paul (a pharmaceutical rep), Pat Sevean, Phil Contardo (a Con. College film student) and patients and staff of the Regional Cancer Centre. Penny Paul convinced her pharmaceutical company to donate \$300 to produce the video (commendable since the video does not recommend any medications). The team worked on the video for a year, using actual patients and their stories, to teach other cancer patients, their families, employers and friends about fatigue resulting from chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Is this starting to sound like more than a \$300 production to you too? Con College is to be commended here also. Pat has presented the video in Quebec, Toronto, Halifax, and London, England to participants in breakout



Pat Henderson

EVERYDAY HEROES

- Here to Stay -

sessions at oncology conferences. It has also been distributed throughout N.W.O. and internationally (as far away as Sydney, Australia) by Ortho-Biotech.

Pat has made it her life's work to ease the path for people living with cancer, and not only on the job at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, where she continues to work as an oncology nurse. She has volunteered with “Look Good Feel Better” for 10 years, after spending 4 years to get the program here in Thunder Bay. “Look Good Feel Better” is a national public-service program dedicated to helping Canadian women living with cancer manage the appearance-related side effects of cancer and its treatment. A boost to their morale and an improved self-image are often the result, making them better able to face their disease.

Pat's husband, Sandy Henderson, is proud of her and happy to see her receive recognition. She and Sandy have been married 41 years and have two children, Kristy in Toronto (married to Faron Morris) and Jonathan here in Thunder Bay. Kristy has given them a couple of good reasons to visit Toronto - Kaitlin and Aidin.

I have had only good experiences at our local cancer centre, but I must say that Pat has always been my special hero there.

Everyday Heroes is a community initiative by Thunder Bay Ventures. Everywhere there are people living, working, playing and contributing to the fabric of our city. Nominate a hero-heroes@thunderbayventures.com. Read about past heroes at www.thunderbayventures.com