

# Advocates of Hope

Raising Cancer Awareness in the Business Community

## Hold On To Hope

BY DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN

*Dr. Nancy Snyderman will be the keynote speaker at the Advocates of Hope: Raising Awareness in the Business Community Summit on October 16 at the University of Delaware's Clayton Hall.*

**A**s a co-founder of LLuminari, a Delaware State Chamber of Commerce member, I am looking forward to meeting other Chamber members to discuss the important topic of cancer in the workplace. In my most recent book about medical myths I talk about how a common medical myth is that we are not winning the war on cancer. The truth: because of the many kinds of cancer, it is not just one war and with the many advances in treatment and new drug therapies we are winning frequently. One of the happy outcomes is that more and more individuals are working during treatments or returning to work after treatment.

I was delighted to accept this invitation as a presenter for the Advocates of Hope Summit. This is truly a unique conference on cancer in the workplace. As a surgical oncologist and author, I counsel cancer patients to "hold on to hope," because I have seen the striking power of optimism in patients with whom I've worked. The Advocates of Hope Summit has an important goal of emphasizing the critical role that employers can play in cancer prevention, detection and the management of an employee's diagnosis, treatment and return to work.

**The following is an excerpt from Dr. Nancy Snyderman's book, *Medical Myths That Can Kill You*.**

Early detection is the key in dealing with all cancers. I'm a big proponent for screening tests and learning all you can about early detection. Even though there are still raging debates about whether early detection reduces death rates or cuts the costs of treating cancer, I err on the side that finding a tumor early is better than detecting it late. When it comes to early detection, no one is more important to the process than you. I can't say it enough, or in too many different ways: don't skip your screening tests and be sure you know what is recommended for you, based on your sex, personal risk factors, family history, and age. Every day you are alive, some scientist somewhere is a day closer to finding a cure.

What follows is a look at some of the most up-to-date information on cancer screening.

**Breast cancer.** The standard screening test remains the mammogram, and most doctors will suggest that a woman



Dr. Nancy Snyderman

get one by her fortieth birthday, or sooner if there is a strong family history. If your doctor says you have dense breasts, he or she might suggest a digital mammography. It produces images of the breast that can be enhanced to help doctors better find abnormalities.

**Ovarian cancer.** As it stands today, there are no great screening tests for ovarian cancer, and this is frustrating. The best defense is an annual pelvic exam in which your gynecologist can feel your ovaries. And there are symptoms to watch for. A vaginal ultrasound, which can be preformed in some doctors' offices, can be a good way of looking at the ovaries. You may have heard of CA-125 for the detection of ovarian cancer. It is not a reliable screen test, however. It recognizes patterns of CA-125 (cancer antigen-125) in the blood, a protein found in elevated levels in most ovarian cancer cells. The test is sensitive but not very specific, and the antigen can be elevated in benign conditions such as pregnancy, endometriosis,

pelvic inflammatory disease, and even other cancers. In terms of early detection, CA-125 is elevated in only approximately half the cases of ovarian cancer.

**Cervical cancer.** Seven strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV) are known to cause cancer of the cervix. In addition to a regular Pap test, your doctor can check for the presence of HPV. HPV and Pap tests are the most accurate way to detect this form of cancer early, and eradicate it before it advances from the cervix. Most doctors advise getting an HPV test every three years, and a yearly Pap test is the norm, in conjunction with a pelvic exam. Almost every woman with cervical cancer who is diagnosed and treated early can have a good outcome. This is a cancer that can be prevented by getting the HPV vaccine during adolescence, even though the vaccine protects against only four of the seven strains. Being in a monogamous relationship and using condoms if you're not are also protective measures.

**Lung cancer.** If you are over age fifty and have smoked at least half a pack of cigarettes a day for twenty years or more,

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it may be prudent to consider a spiral CT, or spiral computed tomography. By rotating around the patient, this lung scan provides three-dimensional images that allow doctors to find many more tiny lung nodules than would be apparent on the standard chest X-ray. It is a sensitive test and can find lung cancer earlier than a standard chest X-ray. It remains to be seen if finding lung cancers early equates to better cure rates. We just don't know yet. Talk to your doctor about whether this test is appropriate for you, and if you're given a thumbs-up, find a testing facility that has experience in lung scanning.

Understanding risk factors for cancer and early detection are two of the best weapons we have. Don't be afraid to call your doctor about any suspicious lump or bump or other symptom. Being aware is the first step toward early diagnosis, and early diagnosis is the first step toward successful treatment.

*Dr. Nancy Snyderman is the chief medical editor for NBC News. She is also a co-founder of LLuminari, Inc., which will officially launch BeWell.com this fall. BeWell is a virtual social network on health and will allow individuals to develop strong online communities around specific health conditions like cancer. ■*

SAVE THE DATE

**Advocates of Hope**  
Raising Cancer Awareness in the Business Community

**Statewide Summit**  
presented by **AstraZeneca**

October 16, 2008

7:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Clayton Hall, University of Delaware, Newark

Registration: \$75/State Chamber members; \$100/nonmembers.

Exhibit tables: \$225-\$325. Nonprofit rates available.

*Program Agenda:*

- 7:30 a.m.     *Networking & continental breakfast among exhibits*
- 8:30 a.m.     *Welcoming remarks*
- 9:30 a.m.     *Panel discussion – Delaware's Cancer Clusters*
- 10:30 a.m.    *Breakout groups*  
*Prevention, Screening & Behavioral Change*  
*The Emotional Side of Managing Cancer*  
*in the Workplace*  
*Insurance and HR Issues*  
*The Future of Advocacy & Public Policy*  
*Cancer Cluster Q&A*
- 11:30 a.m.    *Panel discussion – How Delaware Hospitals Engage*  
*with the Business Community on Cancer*
- 12:45 p.m.    *Lunch & Keynote remarks by Dr. Nancy Snyderman*
- 2:00 p.m.     *Closing remarks followed by book signing*

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