

# bcrc-wa what's news

Issue 6  
June 2015

NEWSLETTER OF  breast cancer  
research centre - WA



**Prof. Arlene Chan**  
Director – BCTU  
Vice-Chair – BCRC-WA

## Welcome to our Issue 6 newsletter.

In this edition we again have many contributors ranging from advice from our health professionals, patients stories and even financial advice.

The important role of our Breast Care Nurses cannot be emphasized enough. Catherine Griffiths, an experienced Breast Care Nurse, has written an article to further explain her role in assisting patients newly diagnosed with breast cancer and how she and other breast nurses can help you.

Linda Armstrong, Unit Manager of Breast Clinical Trials Unit, covers the topics on causes of breast cancer. She also discusses lifestyle changes we can make to ensure some of the risks are removed, promoting healthy living and eating.

Karen Taafe, an active PYNKs member, has organised a raffle with all proceeds going to Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA. Karen hopes that you are able to sell raffle tickets to your friends by contacting the office of BCRC-WA or alternatively go directly to our web page to purchase your tickets at [www.bcrc-wa.com.au](http://www.bcrc-wa.com.au)

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# Mind-Bender



If the day after the day before yesterday was Tuesday, and the day before the day after tomorrow is Thursday, what day is today?

Answer: Wednesday  
(this one makes your brain hurt!)



A special recognition to **Hudsons Coffee** who have generously donated catering and coffees at our PYNKS meetings as well as other BCRC-WA functions.



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 [facebook.com/bcrc-wa](https://www.facebook.com/bcrc-wa)

## Meet the BCRC staff



### Introducing:

Veronica Vassallo

### Position:

Administration Officer

### What does your role involve?

I have been working within Breast Clinical Trials Unit for seven years and feel very lucky to be part of such a vibrant and enthusiastic team.

My role is to organise and maintain many of the non-clinical aspects of clinical trials such as archiving, stationery, filing (plenty of filing!) and all the other daily admin tasks that help to keep the wheels moving. It also involves a lot of contact with other departments within the hospital and medical centre, delivering and collecting files and documents requiring signatures (we still use a lot of paper), recycling, and generally keeping fit.

The meticulous approach required in clinical trials may seem pedantic and a bit daunting, but I have discovered that I like order, and particularly enjoy lists – making them, updating them, and making more – and have come to appreciate the “beauty” of Microsoft Excel, despite initial misgivings. Admin work is by nature fairly repetitive, but with the field of clinical trials constantly evolving there is always something new to learn.

### Tell us about yourself..

In my spare time I like to pretend I'm a tourist in Perth – ride the free buses, wander in the parks, look for new pieces of sculpture and art that appear in the back streets and squares, indulge in a coffee at one of the lovely cafés, and watch the world go by.

# Do We Know What Causes Breast Cancer?

If you or someone you love is diagnosed with cancer, the first question you might ask is why?

Why has this happened to me/my loved one?

This is a question which researchers are working very hard to answer but is a complicated issue.

As we said in the previous edition of the newsletter, one size does not fit all when it comes to how tumours behave and how we can treat them. The same is true for the causes of different cancers. An example most people will be familiar with is that smoking can cause lung cancer. But what about breast cancer?

While we still don't have an easy answer, there are some factors which have been identified as being strongly linked to breast cancer. Some of these are things you can't do much about, like your genes or your age increasing. However, some are related to lifestyle factors we can all be aware of and make changes to diminish our risks. Remember, these are not necessarily causes of breast cancer but we have seen a link between these factors and breast cancer and therefore, it is worthwhile thinking about how we can alter our lifestyles accordingly.

Alcohol – more than 3 standard drinks per week (not per day!) could increase a person's risk of breast cancer

Contraceptive Pill – long term use may be a factor

Low levels of exercise – being active can lower the risk of breast cancer



Weight – obesity, especially in pre-menopausal women, can increase a person's risk.

Green vegetables – the flavonoids in leafy green vegetables may decrease the risk of breast cancer. This has been seen in women who eat an Asian diet including a lot of leafy greens.

HRT – prolonged/consistent use can increase the risk of breast cancer.

We should also mention a few things which have NOT been shown to be linked to breast cancer like soy or flaxseed products, underwire bras or breastfeeding.

While researchers are working hard every day to answer the "why" and other questions surrounding breast cancer, we can make some simple changes to our lifestyles which may make a big difference to our level of risk and also improve our health overall.

**Linda Armstrong**

Unit Manager

Breast Clinical Trials Unit

# Delirium Cycle Race

These awesome riders finished the 24-hour Delirium Cycle Race!

Cycling through wind and rain for 24 hours, these men managed to cover a total distance of 802.9km – absolutely incredible!

With 30 minutes to go, one sponsor offered an extra \$1000 if they reached 800km, and they managed to scrape it in with a super final lap... the total raised for BCRC-WA \$7000 - totally amazing, brilliant effort.

Big thank you from BCRC-WA!



## Monthly Recipe

Our guest home chef is Karen Taafe. Karen Taafe has been working tirelessly to raise funds for Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA by organising a raffle with 100% of the money raised coming to our organisation. If you are interested in buying a raffle ticket, please go to our web page [www.bcrc-wa.com.au](http://www.bcrc-wa.com.au) where you can purchase tickets.

### Yum Yum (Health) Balls

#### INGREDIENTS

- 750g raw almonds
- 1 cup pitted dates (or more, according to taste/sweetness)
- 1 cup pumpkin seeds
- 1 cup sunflower seeds
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 1/2 cup Cocoa powder approx
- Coconut (to coat balls)
- Filtered water or fresh apple juice (to bind mixture)

#### METHOD

Blend the almonds (do in small batches in your blender or NutriBullet), pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds. Blend the dates with some of the nuts.

Place all blended ingredients into a large bowl.

Add the tahini and cocoa powder (you can add more cocoa powder if you would like a richer/darker batch).

Add water or juice (or both) approx 1/2 cup to get the mixture moist enough to roll into golf ball sized balls (but not too wet). Use your hands to mix.

Place a good/large quantity of coconut into a separate bowl.

Coat/roll the balls into the coconut.

Store in a large sealed container in the fridge.

"I like these Yum Yum Balls as they are a healthy, guilt free, sweet treat that all the family will enjoy! You can experiment with the quantities and you can add a variety of nuts, seeds, sultanas or even berries (goji) to the mix."

**Karen Taafe**

# Eat Well, Feel Well

An initiative of Breast Cancer Research Centre WA

Providing you with both complimentary and paid services which will assist you in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.



## Healthy Weight, Healthy Life

**Healthy Weight, Healthy Life** offers early breast cancer patients a free service to assist them with nutritional issues while on treatment.



## Symptom-Less

**Symptom-Less** is a free service that offers advanced breast cancer patients advice on how to deal with symptoms related to their treatment.



## Individualised Sessions

**Individualised Sessions** lets patients meet individually with a dietitian and the service will be specifically tailored to the patient's needs.



The Mount Hospital Pharmacy is conveniently located next door to the main hospital at 1/140 Mounts Bay Road.

We are a team of 13 pharmacist and 8 support staff providing around the clock clinical pharmacy services to the patients and staff of the Mount Hospital.

The Mount Hospital Pharmacy specialises in the sterile preparation of chemotherapy. Highly skilled technicians prepare the chemotherapy in a specialised drug safety cabinet located in our sterile suite. These conditions produce a safe and sterile product and ensure the safety of personnel involved in the preparation of the product as well as the patient and staff administering the chemotherapy.

We have pharmacists who practice primarily in cancer care who can offer advice and support for you and your family whether you receive chemotherapy in the Day Oncology Unit or as an inpatient on Tuart Ward. We also offer a range of products to meet the specific needs of our patients.

Whilst receiving treatment provided by the pharmacy, customers often have questions about fees and charges for medication. Many customers are unaware of additional costs, which are not covered by health funds. Your health dollar has to stretch a long way and the pharmacy uses every avenue available to keep your charges to a minimum.

Medicare provides funding for most common items and this normally required that the customer pays the pharmacy co-payment. Some health funds require the customer to pay this co-payment for all items, whilst other health funds only required the patient to pay for items used away from the hospital. Pharmacy charges may be larger for the first course of chemotherapy because one pharmacy co-payment can cover many treatments.

On your first day of treatment, the pharmacy will record your Medicare number, and any concessions you may have. This is confidential and only used to access subsidised medicines. Some medications are not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) and your consultant may discuss the financial implications with you. A pharmacist is always available to give price quotes and answer any questions you may have.

Please feel free to contact the pharmacy directly with any questions, concerns, or issues that you may have on (08) 9481 1880 or you can email [oncology@mounthospitalpharmacy.com.au](mailto:oncology@mounthospitalpharmacy.com.au)

If you would like to arrange a quick tour and peak at our sterile preparation area, you are most welcome to contact us.



# High Tea at Linneys

A delighted group of our PYNKS ladies were invited to a high tea at Linneys flagship showroom in Subiaco.

What an absolutely delightful morning we had with the help of Vivienne Adams, Corporate Functions Manager of Linneys and her helpful staff.

On entry to the showroom, the ladies were presented with a glass of champagne or sparkling water and given a tour of the beautiful display of Steven Khalil designer wedding gowns. The gowns were exquisite and the material was sublime in its quality. We then entered their internal courtyard where the tables were set out with beautiful china and cakes to spoil us.

The conversation was flowing and we did not want to leave our beautifully presented tables but then came the fun where we were shown into the showroom and were able to try on any piece of jewellery on display. There was a lot of oohs and aahs

as we tried on some very expensive pieces and more moderately priced ones where we all secretly picked our favourites amongst the high quality diamond and pearl fine jewellery designs.

A big thank you to Linneys for inviting us into their establishment as we had a gorgeous morning with much laughter.

If you would like to join our PYNKS group and have metastatic disease, please contact Rochelle Hook via [info@bcrc-wa.com.au](mailto:info@bcrc-wa.com.au) or on 9321 2354





# Pynks

POSITIVE • YOUNG • NURTURING  
KIDS/FAMILY-FOCUSSED • STRENGTH-GIVING

*Do you have secondary cancer?  
Like to talk to like-minded people,  
who really understand?*

Pynks is a support and information group for younger women and those who are young at heart. Pynks provides facts and topics relevant to advanced secondary breast cancer.

For more information telephone **9321 2354**  
or email [info@bcrc-wa.com.au](mailto:info@bcrc-wa.com.au)



Pynks is a BCRC-WA initiative

# The role of a Breast Nurse

Breast cancer is a complex disease, both physically and psychologically.

There are challenges relating to a breast cancer diagnosis, such as recovery from surgery, lengthy periods of treatment, being chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy, all while trying to maintain normality between work and family life. This may add extra pressure on the family, not just financially but also emotionally.

During any phase of a women's diagnosis, a woman can be challenged, resulting in depression and anxiety. Breast surgery may place psychologically on a women's image and sexuality. With chemotherapy side effects of hair loss, fatigue, induced menopause symptoms such as hot flushes and a flattened mood may occur. Therefore, the Breast Cancer Nurse (BCN) supportive care aims at identifying needs for each woman.

Although the number of newly diagnosis women has remained fairly stable, the BCN role has varied over time. Each centre with a BCN may work and define their roles differently depending on their level of experience. With the increased public awareness of the BCNs and their role of supporting women and their families throughout their treatment time being pre-operative or post-operatively. This support may be through financial assistance via the Cancer Council for women who are struggling financially, which we process on their behalf, discussions of and onward referrals for women experiencing menopausal symptoms, women experiencing anxiety and depression during or following completion of their treatment which requires intervention of a clinical psychology service and/or their medical practitioner for medications.

This work is in addition to seeing patients and offering support at diagnosis in the doctor's rooms, providing information regarding proposed surgery, provision of discussion around breast prosthesis, future treatments such as, radiation, chemotherapy or both and possibly hormone treatment. We also provide phone support for pre and post-operative clinical procedures in terms of seroma drainage and importantly attend to wound dressings as needed.

**Catherine Griffiths**  
Breast Care Nurse



*Catherine Griffiths and Kelly McPartland pictured.*

# Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a condition that can occur as a result of breast cancer treatment, due to removal or irradiation of affected lymph nodes and vessels.

Lymphoedema can also result from cancer cells obstructing the lymphatic system. The damaged or removed lymph nodes cannot be replaced, therefore, there is reduction and alteration in the lymph drainage pathways. This can result in the accumulation of fluid in the surrounding tissues (interstitial spaces), causing gradual swelling, heaviness, discomfort and change in the texture and feel of the tissue.

Lymphoedema can develop immediately after breast cancer treatment or it can occur months or even years later. However, it is important to realise that not everyone who has had lymph nodes removed and radiotherapy to the axilla will develop the condition.

There is no cure for lymphoedema, but it can be managed, and identifying early signs is helpful. Early signs of lymphoedema include:

- Feeling of heaviness or tightness in the arm or breast
- Swelling of arm, hand or breast
- Discomfort or aching
- Skin may feel warmer than usual

Often, there are other changes associated with surgery and radiotherapy which should not be mistaken for signs of lymphoedema.

These changes include reduced range of movement, loss of muscle strength and changes in sensation in the arm.

The aim of the treatment is to reduce swelling, improve condition of the tissue, increase range of movement and prevent further complications. The symptoms of lymphoedema often respond well to treatment which means it can be controlled. If left untreated, symptoms may worsen over time.

A specialised physiotherapist can help provide you with a coherent approach to management. The service we provide aims to:

- Provide advice on how to reduce the risk of lymphoedema and recognise early signs
- Provide early diagnosis to optimise treatment and management
- Individualise a treatment plan including manual lymphatic drainage, compression bandages and compression garments
- Advise about skin care
- Develop an exercise program

If you have noticed signs of lymphoedema, please contact Mount Physiotherapy on 9481 1660 to make an appointment.

**Niyati Gautam**  
Physiotherapist



# Our Breast Cancer Journey

My husband, André and I were convinced 2012 was going to be the best year yet, as we had been successful with our second attempt at IVF and just could not wait to announce the impending arrival of a beautiful baby when we reached the 12 week mark.

Little did we know this announcement to family and friends was to be superseded by the announcement that I had been diagnosed with HER2 positive breast cancer when I was 11 weeks pregnant, at the age of 34.

My initial thought was that I would have to abort our treasured and longed for baby, but I was very quickly reassured that would not be the case and I would be able to be treated safely whilst being pregnant. The next few weeks were a whirlwind of hospital admissions for a single mastectomy and then four rounds of chemotherapy combined with obstetrician appointments to ensure our little bundle of joy was developing as he should.

Our son, Luca was born at 35 weeks and he was the most perfect little boy. He had to be admitted to the neonatal unit for the first two weeks of his life due to his lungs not being fully developed at birth, but he grew stronger every day and we got to bring him home for Christmas which was the best present we could ever ask for.

My journey continued three weeks after Luca was born by having another four rounds of chemotherapy and commencing my 12-month Herceptin treatment. We were so lucky to have such wonderful support from our families in order to juggle my treatment along with having a new born baby, and as that year passed, Luca grew, as did my hair!

We always talked about having two children and that was a dream of ours, however, we were also resolved that this may not be possible and we were just so grateful for our blessing of Luca. However, five months after finishing my Herceptin treatment, we decided to try our luck with a frozen embryo cycle (we had 4 embryos remaining). We were absolutely overjoyed to receive the phone call from the IVF clinic to tell us I was pregnant with our second child and I thankfully went on to have a problem-free pregnancy.

Our second son Willem was born at 39 weeks and was perfect. I was very apprehensive about whether I would be able to breastfeed from my remaining breast, as I was only able to breastfeed Luca for three weeks before my treatment commenced, and didn't really produce much breast milk. So I was thrilled as each day passed and Willem continued to feed and put on weight. Willem is now three months old and absolutely thriving, all thanks to my one breast.

So in spite of the breast cancer card I was dealt in 2012, we have gone on to be blessed with two healthy, happy little boys and I have been able to fulfil a desire to breastfeed my baby. Therefore, I do believe dreams can come true and you should never give up on your dreams of having children and being able to successfully breastfeed after your breast cancer journey.

## Kristy van Boheemen



# Local Footy supporting Local Women through Local Research

Imagine – Pink footballs, pink hair, pink armbands, pink socks, pink umpires, pink goal flags, pink cars, pink balloons, pink cakes, pink hats, and pink raffles.

This amazing scene was created by junior football clubs for the 'Pink Round' on Mother's Day to raise funds and awareness for Breast Cancer Research Centre –WA. The raffles created by clubs were awesome and the cake stalls were an absolute delight to behold.

The Pink Round started in 2014 through the fantastic efforts of Leah Stupar with the Hills Rangers. Leah has worked tirelessly with SDFDC and BCRC-WA to extend the initiative beyond her club to other Junior Football clubs in the Swan District in 2015 and going forward, throughout WA in 2016.

“The Swans District Football Development Council (SDFDC) is proud to support the BCRC-WA Pink Round initiative for breast cancer research, education and awareness for women of all ages. The Pink Round is a fantastic fundraiser for Swans District Junior community clubs to help increase the profile and recognition of the important role BCRC-WA plays in our WA community. Women play an integral role in our local volunteer sport and, by providing the necessary support and awareness through initiatives such as this, Swans District is proud to be associated with BCRC-WA and support the Mother's Day Pink Round going forward” commented Daniel Curtis, Development Officer, Swans District.



BCRC-WA are excited to see the Pink Round become a permanent fixture on the JFC's yearly events calendar with an even larger number of clubs committing to next year. As a not-for-profit organisation with no government funding, fundraising initiatives such as the Pink Round are essential to the ongoing work of BCRC-WA.

**A big thank you to:**

- Swan District Football Development Council
- Leah Stupar
- Junior football players
- Hills Rangers JFC
- Upper Swan JFC
- Bassendean JFC
- Darlington JFC
- South Perth JFC
- Caversham JFC
- Swan View JFC
- Mount Lawley/Inglewood JFC
- High Wycombe JFC



# Seek financial guidance early

A life-threatening or terminal illness affects almost every aspect of life for the patient, carer, and family. These changes, in turn, impact on the financial situation.

## Seek guidance early

It is important to consider the options and assistance available and to seek guidance from appropriately trained people who are experts in the area. Premature or ill-advised action – especially in relation to superannuation, insurance, early retirement – can result in the loss of important benefits.

It is best to do this very early so that you do not make decisions you may regret or find out that you have missed out on entitlements or assistance that could have been very helpful.

As your financial situation is impacted by many factors, a checklist is useful to assist in planning ahead and seeking assistance.

Contact your bank as soon as you can. To alleviate your stress, they will be able to offer alternatives to repay your loans.

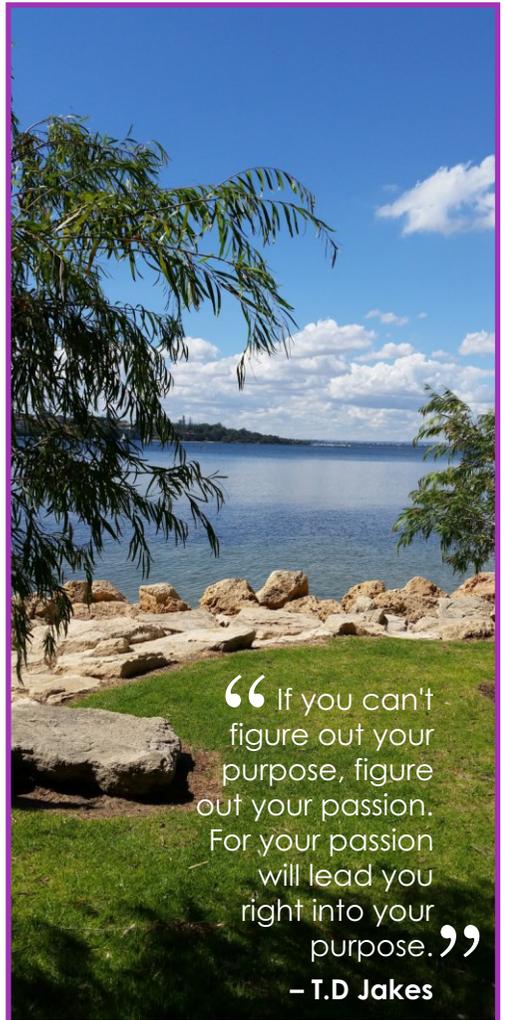
1. The bank may be able to offer a more suitable loan to your current situation.
2. Offer a repayment holiday (usually three month term and that amount is capitalised to the loan).
3. You may have enough funds in your redraw to allow you to stop payments for a specific period of time.

4. Change your loan to interest only for up to 5 years.

Everyone's circumstances are different, so please approach your financial institution and ask them for assistance.

## Rebecca Lillie

Commonwealth Bank  
Local Business Banking  
Q&A Centre



“ If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose.”

– T.D Jakes

# Support Breast Cancer Research WA & Win...

**\$5**  
per ticket



## About Lord Howe Island

- Recorded by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site of global natural significance.
  - The world's southernmost coral reef.
  - Located 660km off the north coast of NSW and less than two hours flight from Sydney
- Find out more: [www.lordhoweisland.info](http://www.lordhoweisland.info)

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Prize drawn on 9th July, 2015. Winner will be Notified by email/phone. Winner must be over the age of 18. Winner Published in The West Australian Newspaper on 13th July, 2015. Prize is valid between 12th September until 30th November 2015. Return flights from Sydney/Lord Howe Island. Check raffle tickets & website [www.bcrc-wa.com.au](http://www.bcrc-wa.com.au) for full terms & conditions. Permit holder: K Taaffe 0431 592 766. Permit No. LS207189648



Striving to improve outcomes  
for patients with breast cancer.



☎ 9321 2354

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Help us get the  
word out there  
about the amazing  
work of BCRC-WA!