Improving Access, Saving Lives:  
The Breast Care Program at SFGH

It’s not every day that an Oscar-winning actress visits San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center (SFGH). But it is every day that the Avon Comprehensive Breast Care Center helps save lives there.

Reese Witherspoon, who serves as honorary chairwoman for the Avon Foundation for Women, was in San Francisco last May along with Bay Area breast cancer experts and survivors to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Avon Center. Generous funding from the Avon Foundation has enabled the center to provide breast imaging, evaluation and treatment, and genetic counseling and testing services to San Francisco’s most vulnerable and medically underserved individuals. To that end, culturally sensitive research, education, and navigation are enabling women in need to access an extraordinary array of services.

Those efforts are paying off. Since its opening in 2004, more than 34,000 breast imaging exams and 2,000 breast biopsy procedures have been performed at the Avon Center.

“Breast cancer is a curable and treatable disease. Screening has been proven to reduce mortality by 30 percent,” explains Dr. Lori Strachowski, Medical Director for the Avon Center. “Unfortunately for many of our patients, fear or competing social issues keep them from getting preventive care. They tend to wait until their disease becomes palpable or otherwise clinically apparent. However, if we catch abnormalities when they’re small enough, we can often spare women from complete mastectomies or worse.”

Located on the SFGH campus, the Avon Comprehensive Breast Care Center is a 4,500 square-foot building designed to deliver high-quality breast care to all women who receive care at SFGH. At its centerpiece is a safe and quiet healing garden where women can reflect and meditate.

“The Center is an inviting facility where women can feel comfortable and supported,” says Strachowski. “It’s private. It’s centralized. It’s efficient and effective.

“Before the Avon Center opened, mammography services were provided in the main hospital building,” she continues. “Often, the women would wait in the halls in their hospital gowns with patients from the emergency room or those hospitalized passing by on the gurneys, waiting for their mammogram. If they needed a breast ultrasound, they would get in queue with everyone else who urgently needed an ultrasound, which may have taken hours.”

Now screening and diagnostic services, including mammography, ultrasound and breast biopsies, are performed at the Avon Center. Surgery and medical services are provided in the SFGH Breast Clinic, located within the hospital’s Department of Surgery Clinic on Ward 3-M.

Doctors Judy Luce and Peggy Knudson established the Breast Clinic in 1992 to ensure that lower-income, often uninsured, women with abnormal breast findings and breast cancer would receive the highest quality care and treatment. Luce and Knudson continue to co-direct the Breast Clinic today.

“We started the clinic because too many women were dying of breast cancer at San Francisco General,” Luce says. “What we needed to do was make sure these women were getting early screening. And for that to happen, we had to make the system as user-friendly as possible.”

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Breast Care Program

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Culture, language and family responsibilities were among the barriers preventing that access.

“Breast cancer is a complicated disease,” says Luce. “We take care of our patients by getting them screened, and if necessary, getting them into and through the system.”

Key to the clinic’s success are Women’s Care Navigators who literally speak the same language as the patients they work with. Every woman who is diagnosed at SFGH is assigned a navigator to guide her through the continuum of cancer treatment in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner.

“Navigation helps make the process seamless,” says Luce. “From screening through treatment, through post-treatment follow-up, navigators help our patients with appropriate education and support programs.”

The navigators also serve as critical links between SFGH and community partners that pay particular attention to women who may be left out of the mainstream of health care. Often, women in the Chinese, Latino, African-American, Filipino and other minority communities face multiple life challenges that make living with breast cancer even more challenging. Poverty, low literacy rates, family responsibilities and cultural taboos, to name a few factors, limit women’s ability or inclination to seek care.

But the navigators advocate for SFGH breast cancer patients, and connect them with community agencies that overcome obstacles on the road to screening and services. For example, the Circulo de Vida cancer support agency pairs newly diagnosed Latinas with “Angelitas” who are breast cancer survivors themselves. At the Chinatown Public Health Center, a peer support network has been equally well received; now the center is extending its support services to children of family members with cancer, too.

In addition to the Women’s Care Navigator Program, patient education is a top priority of the Avon Center. The Cancer Awareness Resources and Education program provides health education and psychosocial support to cancer patients who receive their medical care at SFGH. Through a series of twelve-week classes in English, Spanish and Chinese, the program promotes self-care and coping skills.

“We focus on life after treatment, too,” adds Shermineh Jafarieh, Program Manager for the Avon Center. “Some cancer survivors are prone to developing lymphedema, which is a swelling of the arms and chest walls. Our Lymphedema Education and Referral Program provides education and navigator services for patients at risk for lymphedema.”

Continued Avon funding has allowed breast cancer patients at SFGH to participate in clinical trials for breast cancer risk reduction, breast cancer treatment, and symptom management during and after breast cancer treatment. The clinical trials also include studies of lymphedema and chest wall pain.

“The clinical trials at SFGH are both crucial and unique,” explains Jafarieh. “Many breast centers have clinical trials, but they’re primarily for insured patients. Our patients present different risk factors; they can have different lifestyle issues and different genetic makeup than a population that has greater access to insurance and resources. Treatments that are shown to work for that community might not be effective for our patients. Our SFGH population adds much-needed diversity to the classic clinical trials population.”

Because genetics and family history are such important indicators of predisposition to cancer, the Avon Center works in collaboration with the SFGH Cancer Risk Program to provide genetic counseling and testing at no cost. The collaboration is the first of its kind in the nation. Based on family history, other cancer risk factors and genetic testing results, each patient receives an individualized risk management program that includes recommendations for cancer screening and options for preventive measures.

Avon Center program and medical staff also serve on the San Francisco Women Cancer Network (WCN), a council of community-based organizations caring for underserved breast cancer patients. The capacity-building network raises funds to support and address gaps in services and healthcare for low income under/uninsured women.

“I think most people don’t understand just how comprehensive the program is here,” says Jafarieh.

To augment the healing potential of the facility, T. Delaney, Inc./SEAM Studio joined Tsang Architecture and the SFGH facilities team to create a garden of repose and restitution at the core of the Avon Center. This union of art and nature serves to create a truly unique healing environment for the underserved community who use this facility.

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Orthopaedic Trauma Institute Opens

When local dignitaries and healthcare leaders cut the ribbon for the Orthopaedic Trauma Institute (OTI) opening on the San Francisco General Hospital (SFGH) campus last February, they welcomed an extraordinary new asset to San Francisco. The OTI is the most complete facility of its kind at any public hospital or academic institution in the United States.

Featuring state-of-the-art equipment that facilitates the best in clinical care, the center is also home to a comprehensive research and education infrastructure. Approximately 75 physicians, rehabilitation specialists, scientists, clinical researchers and support staff work at the OTI; all are dedicated to orthopaedic trauma care, treatment, training and research.

“What we’ve built here is a multipronged approach to taking care of orthopaedic trauma patients,” says Ted Miclau, MD, Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at SFGH. “Usually, clinicians and researchers don’t have much opportunity to work together. But here, the environment is integrated; there’s incredible cross-fertilization between disciplines.”

Miclau adds that such integration does more than enable orthopaedic trauma physicians and staff to provide the highest quality clinical care.

“The OTI is the most complete facility of its kind at any public hospital or academic institution in the United States. It helps us promote and teach orthopaedic trauma treatment through our scientific discoveries and educational programs,” he says.

In fact, the OTI houses an exceptional training facility that helps to recruit surgical students from around the world. The draw is a chance to learn with high-end equipment in one of the most intense trauma environments anywhere.

The initial funding for the center came from private donations (including those from doctors themselves), the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation and support from industry.

“They recognized what a unique educational opportunity the OTI presented,” says Miclau. “The OTI is an amazing asset, not just for the city, but for the entire field of trauma care. We’ve created something that will have a worldwide impact for many years to come.”

San Francisco General Hospital with its focus on the patient does not only mirror my values but also those of Genentech. Thus, I contacted our Human Resource Department in order to have my contribution matched by our Matching Gifts Program. After completing a simple form, I felt good that my donation to the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation would be matched and my contribution will make twice the difference for the patients at the General.

Oliver Rosen, MD
Senior Medical Director
Head of GI Oncology
BioOncology Medical Affairs at Genentech

Donor Spotlight

I was raised and educated in Germany. I practiced medicine in Germany in a health care system that provided access to everybody. My patients were in a public hospital that had an open door system. I believe everyone deserves high-quality healthcare. I have been working at Genentech now for more than three years. I live in San Francisco and I recognized the San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center as a vital asset to the community. Thus, I felt it is important to support the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation.
HEROES & HEARTS
5TH ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON
Thursday, February 11, 2010, Union Square
Luncheon Tickets available soon. For sponsorship information, please contact
Katie Moe at 415.206.5928 or email kmoe@sfghf.net

Do you know a Hero?
San Francisco General Hospital Foundation is sponsoring the 5th annual Heroes & Hearts Luncheon on Thursday, February 11, 2010
This event is an opportunity to honor those within the community who have demonstrated exceptional and inspirational behavior. Our goal is to salute these special individuals by telling their stories.

Download a nomination form at sfghf.net
**Grant Highlights**

**January through June 2009**

**Avon Foundation**
- $730,000 to support the Avon Center.

**California HealthCare Foundation**
- $40,000 to participate in the Public Hospital Improvement Collaborative. Participation in this collaborative will help SFGH to implement evidence-based best practices when caring for patients with Pneumonia.

**Kaiser Permanente**
- $300,000 to support the Center for Specialty Access & Quality (CSAQ), a coalition of health care providers in San Francisco that will assess the barriers to specialty care experienced by underserved populations, develop and implement innovative approaches to overcoming these barriers, and educate others on their findings and strategies.
- $15,000 to conduct a formal program evaluation of the Cancer, Awareness, Resources and Education (CARE) program.

**Lucasfilm Foundation**
- $50,000 to provide operating support for the Orthopaedic Biomechanical Testing Facility.

**OMEGA Medical Grants**
- $58,000 to support an orthopaedic trauma fellowship for one year.

**Orthopaedic Research & Education Foundation (OREF)**
- $75,000 to support an orthopaedic trauma fellowship for one year.

**San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate**
- $383,151 to purchase digital mammography screening equipment for use in the Avon Center.
- $28,618 to establish the Susan G. Komen Wheels to Wellness Fund to provide transportation assistance for breast cancer patients.

**The San Francisco Foundation**
- $150,000 over three years to establish Partners in Nursing Education, a program to mentor SFGH employees pursuing a professional career in nursing.

**Special thanks Kaiser Permanente and its donation of 1,500 children’s books to the SFGH Pediatric Reach Out And Read (ROAR) program.**

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**Breast Care Program**

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But is it successful? By many measures, the answer would have to be yes. Before the program began, just half the women who were diagnosed with breast cancer at SFGH survived for five years or more. Now that rate is up to three-quarters.

“We look at the number of mammograms we provide and determine the percentage of breast cancers that are diagnosed early. Do we get women in and provide them with necessary treatment and follow-up? We do,” says Luce. “Our follow-up efforts have climbed to 100 percent since we got navigators. Their influence has been dramatic.

“Are we providing the highest quality care? Are we providing as much breast preservation as we can? Are all the women who should be receiving radiation, chemotherapy or lumpectomies getting them? Do we have low mastectomy rates?” she asks. “I think we meet those standards.”

Those efforts have not gone unnoticed. The Avon Center at SFGH is one of just eight of the foundation’s flagship centers nationwide.

So when Reese Witherspoon took the podium at SFGH in May, she was hardly acting. After touring the Avon Center and spending time with several cancer survivors, she said, “As a woman, a mother and the honorary chairwoman of the Avon Foundation, I know firsthand what important progress we are funding in both breast cancer research and access to patient care. It was truly a privilege to share this day with those who will bring us closer to a world without breast cancer.”

To find out more about how you can help support Breast Care Programs at San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, please call 415.206.4478 or make a donation using the enclosed envelope.
In providing nearly 34,000 breast imaging exams since the Avon Comprehensive Breast Care Center’s opening in 2004, the Center’s current digital mammography machines are in critical need of replacement due to the “sun setting” of vendor technology that is no longer supported for repair and maintenance. To address this critical need for reliable equipment, the Komen San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate has awarded a grant of $383,151 to purchase one new digital mammography machine.

A second grant of $28,618 was awarded to establish the Susan G. Komen Wheels to Wellness Fund which will provide transportation assistance for breast cancer patients to get to and from vital treatment services and wellness activities. Lack of adequate transportation remains a major barrier to accessing care for underserved breast cancer patients and directly impacts their survival. This fund will be coordinated by the SFGH Foundation in collaboration with the San Francisco Women’s Cancer Network, a network of community partners who provide safety net services for breast cancer patients who primarily seek their care at SFGH.

“Last year, our Board of Directors and Grants Committee became aware that there were increasing waiting periods for mammograms at SFGH. As the priority of our grant making is to overcome barriers that prevent underserved women in our community from receiving breast cancer services, Komen San Francisco Bay Area is very gratified to be able to partner with San Francisco General Hospital to fund not only the new mammography machine, but also the transportation fund,” remarks Executive Director Maria Sousa, Komen San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate.

SFGH Senior Associate Administrator Roland Pickens praises both grants saying “In light of the current economic environment, both grants from the Komen San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate are a beacon of hope.”

San Francisco General Hospital Foundation Board President, Judy Guggenhime, was on hand to accept both grants with Dr. Lori Strachowski (not pictured) from Amy Buckner, Board President, Komen San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate and June Hom, Grants Committee Chairperson, Komen San Francisco Bay Area Affiliate.
Thank You

The San Francisco General Hospital Foundation gratefully acknowledges the generous support of our donors for their gifts made from January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008.

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San Francisco General Hospital Foundation is dedicated to improving the care and comfort of patients at San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center.

Of Note

Dr. John Luce retired July 1, 2009. Dr. Luce has ably served SFGH for 28 years, most recently as Chief Medical Officer and Professor of Clinical Medicine and Anesthesia.

Welcome Dr. Neil Powe as the new Chief of the Department of Medicine.

The Pediatric Asthma Clinic celebrates its 19th Anniversary.

Dr. Kevin Grumbach received the California Campus Compact’s 2009 Richard E. Cone Award for Excellence and Leadership in Cultivating Community Partnerships in Higher Education.

Congratulations to A. Sue Carlisle, MD, PhD, Associate Dean, SFGH and Jack W. McAninch, MD, Chief of Urology, SFGH who received the Rapaport Award on June 16 at the annual medical staff dinner. The Rapaport Award is given to those who have demonstrated a commitment to San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center in the areas of patient care, leadership, teaching, research, and/or community service.

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