

Patient Advocate Works to Spread the Word About Male Breast Cancer

by Chevas Samuels

Breast cancer wasn't uppermost on his Bob Riter's mind when in 1996, at age 40, he noticed a small lump under his nipple and bleeding from the nipple:

"I was mostly surprised. Surprised I had cancer and surprised it was breast cancer."

Male breast cancer is relatively uncommon and in 2018, just over 2,500 men in the US were diagnosed with the disease; that's only 1% of the incidence in women (*American Cancer Society Cancer Facts and Figures 2018*).

"I had heard of it, but it wasn't on my list of things to worry about and I had no family history of breast cancer."

As in the majority of cases in both men and women, Bob's breast cancer had started in a milk duct. Both males and females have milk ducts, though they don't normally function in males. Bob had Stage 2 Invasive ductal carcinoma, so his cancer had broken through the duct wall to invade the tissue outside, from where it could spread via the bloodstream or lymph system to other parts of the body.

Treatment for both men and women with breast cancer is very similar:

"I had a mastectomy and then six months of chemo. I began taking tamoxifen, a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM), but had to stop because of side effects."

Tamoxifen is the oldest and most commonly prescribed medication to reduce the risk of recurrence of breast cancer. Its side effects include: hot flashes, nausea, depression and headache. But despite not taking the drug for long, Bob's cancer didn't return.

I asked him more about his experiences and his cancer advocacy work.

What kind of support system did/do you have when you had cancer?

"I'm single, so much of my support came from my sister and from a number of friends. I then became very involved with the Ithaca Breast Cancer Alliance, now known as the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes."

[Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes – Cornell Center on the ...](#)



<https://psoc.engineering.cornell.edu/research/education.../finger-lakes-cancer-center/>

Is your own experience of cancer the reason why you became a patient advocate?

"Yes. I've been involved in advocacy and support almost since the time I was diagnosed in 1996."

Do you think male breast cancer is a disease that some men never have diagnosed, even if they know "something is not right" with their breasts? If so, why?

"Men with breast lumps sometimes delay seeing a physician. This is why men are often diagnosed at a later stage. Men are now more open today than when I was diagnosed. There's more awareness and support."

What, as a patient advocate, do you do?

"I was the executive director of the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes for many years. We provide information and support to people in and around Ithaca, NY. Now, I work at Cornell University, connecting cancer researchers and people in the community who have cancer."

Would you like readers to contact you on social media? What is your contact information?

"Love it!"

Bob Riter's Contact Information:

<http://blogs.cornell.edu/cancercommunitypartnership/>

<https://www.facebook.com/cornellcommunitycancer/>

<https://twitter.com/CancerCornell>

<https://malebreastcancercoalition.org/Survivor%20Stories/bob-riter/>