

Reflections of a Survivor~

I was diagnosed in 1996, 13 years ago. The doctors gave me a choice to remove the lump and take chemo or have a mastectomy. I had a mastectomy. It was a very difficult time in my life. Back then, there was no literature available in Spanish. Now, because of Komen, there are a lot of educational materials in Spanish. It would have made a big difference for me if I had had Spanish information when I was diagnosed. I needed information about surgery and what would happen to me. Cuando tu leyes tu sabes mas o menos lo que va a pasar. I didn't have anyone to speak to in Spanish.

Many Hispanic women are dying of breast cancer because they don't know where to go and how to get what they need. Language is a barrier to health care. I learned a lot about breast cancer through the Amigas Unidas program at MetroHealth. Through funding by Komen, they provide training so that women like me can educate other Latina women about breast health. We try to make sure that they understand the information and answer any questions they have. We tell women how to get a mammogram and where to go – all in Spanish.

I know many women who have gotten free mammograms through MetroHealth and Komen. These women worry they might have cancer and they are afraid to find out. Talking to Amigas gives them strength and hope. I enjoy talking to survivors because I've been there. I talk to them about not being afraid. You have to continue your life. I try to advocate for them and try to make them laugh. I try to do what I wish people did for me.

Now, my daughter and cousin want to be Amiga volunteers so that they can help other people fight this disease. There are over 100 Latina women who are on the waiting list to be an Amiga. Because of Komen, there is more education, more hope and more women surviving than 13 years ago. We have the Amigas and we are finding our voice.

*Mildred Maldonado
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