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Insight news update

On Mother's Day this year, Queensland women celebrated the release of a new Cancer Council Queensland research report revealing that death rates among women from breast cancer in Queensland have been decreasing by almost three per cent each year since the mid 1990s.

The report was good news for young mothers like Kelly Bates. Four years ago, Kelly's young family was shattered by the news that a small lump in her right breast was a malignant tumour.

With no history of cancer in her family, Kelly's initial horror was quickly followed by a desperate search for information and support.

"My specialist warned me not to overload myself with too much information – or to start comparing myself to other

women's treatment," Kelly says.

"But I did exactly what he told me not to do. It got to the point where my husband would come in at midnight to find me hunched over the computer, searching for information. He just said to me 'you've got to stop doing this'."

Within a fortnight, Kelly had had part of her breast removed, followed shortly after by a full mastectomy.

"At the time, I was just filled with so much fear. I thought, 'I've got cancer. I have a baby and a five-year-old son and I don't know what's going to happen to me or my family'.

"When I first left the hospital, I didn't really know what to expect. I felt vulnerable and alone and unable to communicate my feelings with family and children."

Then Kelly made her first phone call to the Cancer Council.

"I spoke to a lovely lady who provided me with the practical information I needed. She also told me about the peer support services that the Cancer Council provides."

Following her initial phone call, the Cancer Council introduced Kelly to one of our breast cancer volunteers named Suzy. Like Kelly, Suzy had recently been through breast cancer treatment.

"I guess at that point I was just looking for some reassurance. The doctors were great, but they can only give you statistics on what your chances are.

"Suzy will never know how much that first phone call meant to me. Just to speak to someone who's been through



CANCER FACT:

Breast cancer can also develop in men, although it is much less common. Male breast cancer accounts for about 1% of all breast cancer incidences.

cancer, who's come out the other side, it just filled me with hope.

"She was like a role model to me ... to think that she had gone through something like that herself. It gave me something to hold on to and helped me deal with the unknown."

Kelly's story is not uncommon. For women in remote communities who face a breast cancer diagnosis, the physical, emotional and financial challenges, coupled with geographical isolation from support services, can be overwhelming. These pressures can impact the treatment and recovery process, with serious implications for quality of life.

In May this year, the Cancer Council held the world's first ever global conference for women affected by breast cancer. The conference took place in Brisbane during a two-week Celebration of Hope festival, providing a range of community activities designed to inspire support and celebrate the courage of women who have experienced breast cancer.

The conference helped to connect breast cancer

survivors like Kelly and Suzy, to overcome the barriers that prevent breast cancer survivors from accessing vital support services.

Cancer Council Queensland, with the support of its sponsors, provided travel scholarships for 19 Queensland women to attend the conference – many from remote regions of Queensland that are under-serviced in health. These women wouldn't have been able to attend the conference without the Cancer Council's assistance.

The conference was one of the many ways that the Cancer Council is removing the barriers that prevent some women from accessing the benefits of vital support services that can improve their survivorship.

According to our latest research report, Female Breast Cancer in Queensland 1982 to 2006, survival has improved in the past two decades, even though incidence rates have generally been increasing.

According to the report, the number of women diagnosed with breast cancer in Queensland each year almost tripled from 861 in 1982 to 2491 in 2006, mainly as a

result of population growth and ageing, but also due in part to changes in lifestyle factors such as fertility, obesity and exercise.

The CEO of Cancer Council Queensland, Professor Jeff Dunn, says the improvement in the rate of survival is significant.

"The report shows that the number of women dying of breast cancer has slowed significantly in relation to the number of diagnoses.

"These statistics are the best evidence we have that early detection and screening programs are working, enabling us to detect breast cancer at its earliest stages and treat it straight away, thereby improving prospects for survival.

"Importantly, our progress is an outcome of the generous community support that helps to fund the research and support services provided by the Cancer Council.

"With thanks to community funding, our next generation of Queenslanders have been given hope for a cancer free future."

NEWS UPDATE:

In 2009, Cancer Council Queensland will provide \$12.9 million for cancer research projects that could help to save the life of someone you know.

For information and support, please call the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20** (toll free) 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday or visit www.cancerqld.org.au



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