

No Time to Wait



The saying goes, “March comes in like a lion and out like a lamb.” For Omega Jones, a Fayetteville radio personality and the voice of Cape Fear Valley Health’s Take Charge Of Your Health program, March 2010 let loose a vicious roar when she was diagnosed with breast cancer at the beginning of the month.

ONE IN EIGHT WOMEN IN AMERICA HAVE BREAST CANCER, MAKING IT THE SECOND MOST COMMON CANCER IN WOMEN TODAY. STUDIES SHOW THAT, WHILE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LIKE OMEGA JONES MAY BE LESS LIKELY TO GET THE DISEASE, THEY SEEM TO BE TWICE AS LIKELY TO DIE FROM IT.



It’s unclear why African American women have a higher mortality rate for breast cancer. One theory is they are less likely to have regular mammograms, a key in early detection and thus survival of breast cancer.

Jones herself was hesitant to have a mammogram. She did not feel her symptoms were typical breast cancer symptoms: a lump in the breast or underarm, irritation or dimpling of breast skin, redness or flaky skin in the nipple

area, pain in any area of the breast or nipple discharge other than breast milk.

“I felt no lumps,” she said. “I had no pain. I just had a funny feeling, an engorged breast like there was a rush of milk. So I made an appointment with my doctor.”

Shirley Elbinias-Tan, M.D., a family physician at Hope Mills Family Care, warned Jones that this could be the early stages of breast cancer and ordered a mammogram.

Omega scheduled an appointment at Cape Fear Valley’s Breast Care Center. There she had a digital mammogram so advanced it could find tumors the size of a ballpoint pen tip.

“I was amazed at the technology,” she said. “They found cancer cells so small they’d never have shown up on a regular mammogram.”

Due to the cancer’s early detection, Jones found herself with options many don’t have.

“Because it was found early, I didn’t have to have chemo. And I was able to wait before I started radiation therapy,” she says. “It gave me time to prepare myself, to get used to the idea before I started treatment.”

Today she finds herself with a good prognosis. She is currently cancer free and educating others about the importance of early detection by organizing a Health and Healing Expo for next Mother’s Day.

“Your body tells you when it doesn’t feel well,” says Jones. “If I’d waited for a lump, the prognosis would’ve been different. I listened to my body and got a mammogram.”

Every woman should take an active part in breast cancer detection by conducting

monthly breast self-exams. Check for changes in size or shape of the breast, as well as any changes to your armpit area each month. You know your body better than anyone else; if you notice a change, make an appointment with your physician for an exam.

If you are age 40 or older, have a screening mammogram conducted every one to two years. Having regular mammograms can greatly lower your chance of dying from breast cancer, as they catch abnormalities earlier than self exam or clinical breast exams may.

“It’s so important to get a mammogram,” says Jones. “If I can get just one woman to get a mammogram, I’ll feel I’ve done what I need to do.”



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