

Social worker's foundation cheers cancer patients

by Kathryn Holleman

BJH ■ The patient lives on in Aleeza Granote's memory.

She was a young woman with aggressive, advanced cancer. Her family lived far away, her boyfriend had left, and she was in the hospital, alone, afraid and in pain.

The patient was in Barnes-Jewish Hospital on nursing unit 3200, where Granote was an oncology social worker two years ago. Granote felt drawn to the young woman who was about the same age. "We bonded," she says.

As the patient underwent grueling treatments, Granote tried to lift her spirits, sometimes with extraordinary measures such as arranging a makeover and studio time in BJC media services. But the patient lit up when she received a card from her grandmother.

"You could just see it in her eyes," says Granote.

Though the patient eventually died, at home with her family, Granote couldn't forget how a simple card had brightened the patient's outlook.

Granote went to full-time pediatric oncology social work, while continuing to work PRN at BJH. But she began to wonder if she could bring a bit of that brightness to other cancer patients.

Studies have shown that support can significantly improve the coping skills of individuals with cancer, providing an uplifting message of hope and encouragement, she says. Adults often feel isolated while undergoing cancer treatment because there are relatively few support services available.

Granote decided to start an organization that would send uplifting cards to cancer

patients. She hit on the idea of having volunteers make cards, and write a message of encouragement inside.

"I didn't know one thing about card-making when I started this," Granote says. But she found entire websites and craft store aisles devoted to the art of making cards. She also found that religious and social organizations often had crafting clubs just looking for projects to work on.

So last September, Card Care Connection was born. Granote worked to set up a website, gather donations of money and card-making supplies, and make contact with local crafting groups, hospitals, cancer organizations and hospices. Soon, she was organizing card-making events and parties.

"As we started doing these events, we found out it had a dual effect," says Granote. "It's great for the patients who get the cards, but it's also fun and meaningful for the people who make them. They really feel like they're contributing to a good cause."

Through word of mouth from health care providers and family members, Granote also began getting referrals of patients who would like to receive cards.

"I recognize that each individual experience with cancer is unique," says Granote. "I created this program to reach any patient with cancer, no matter where they are in their disease process. We send cards to wherever they reside. We have sent cards to patients in various settings such as hospice care, nursing homes, hospitals, or outpatient treatment."

Card Care Connection has been picking up momentum. Several card-making events are scheduled, more than 1,600 cards



Aleeza Granote, Barnes-Jewish Hospital oncology social worker, shows a selection of cards made for cancer patients. | Courtesy photo

have been collected for patients, and a recent spot on KSDK-TV's "Making a Difference" feature resulted in publicity and a \$500 donation.

"This is so exciting," says Granote. "It is gratifying to see this program grow and touch more lives every day."

For more information or to make a donation or patient referral to Card Care Connection, go to www.cardcareconnection.com. ■

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