

Hoag Cancer Center Gets Support From Women Who Have 'Been There'

By DENNIS McLELLAN,
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Last August, Richard and Sandy Sewell made a substantial donation to Hoag Hospital's \$21-million Cancer Center in Newport Beach.

In fact, the Newport Beach couple's \$500,000 donation is the largest single private contribution to the 65,000-square-foot facility, which will consolidate all outpatient cancer treatment resources under one roof and offer the latest treatment and research techniques.

But Sandy Sewell wanted to do more.

The result is Circle 1000, a support group of women donors to the Hoag Cancer Center, which will undergo ground breaking in April.

It is women, she says, who are most threatened by cancer.

"I think cancer is the biggest threat to women in today's modern world. In all the statistics you read, women have more cancer than men. I personally know 82 ladies in the harbor area who have had cancer, and they're all ages. A lot of it is because of breast cancer."

That is a subject Sandy Sewell, 52, knows only too well.

Ten years ago, she underwent surgery for breast cancer.

While undergoing radiation therapy after her mastectomy, Sewell was told by one doctor that she had only five to 10 years to live. As it turns out, a month after she and her developer husband made their donation to the Hoag Cancer Center, Sewell reached the 10-year mark.

"From all signs, and from what my doctors say, I'm definitely cured of it," she says. "I'm really a positive, optimistic-type person, but any person who had cancer lives with the underlying fear they will have it again."

Sewell is not the only member of the Circle 1000 founders committee who has had a firsthand experience with cancer. Four other women on the 15-member committee have had cancer and, Sewell says, "the other ladies on the committee have either lost someone or have a real reason to be active in the fight against

cancer."

Founders committee member Louise Ewing, 50, of Balboa says she joined Circle 1000 "because I had cancer 10 years ago and I think this is an outstanding opportunity to support a center that is going to be using interleukin-2, which I feel is the newest and best treatment for cancer. It avoids radiation, chemotherapy and all the garbage we've had to put up with for cancer."

(Interleukin-2, an experimental cancer research and treatment program that relies on the body's immune system to fight the disease, is being used at Hoag Hospital.)

Although the founders committee only began soliciting supporters in late January, the number of Circle 1000 donors has already reached about 200. There are three levels of support: founding members (those who donate \$1,000 and will be listed on a scroll in the Hoag Cancer Center), associate members (\$500) and supporting members (\$150).

Sewell's fund-raising goal for the group the first year is at least \$100,000, which will go toward "construction and the continuation of the first-rate ongoing treatment programs that will occur once the center is built. The long-term goal is to eventually have 1,000 ladies contributing to the cancer center."

Unlike other support groups, Sewell says Circle 1000 will not conduct meetings nor hold fund-raising activities. "We tried to gear this toward a lady who's busy and just wants to give support but doesn't want to get involved in attending meetings and working on fund-raisers."

Circle 1000, however, will hold an annual recognition event for supporters.

The inaugural recognition brunch for donors will be held Wednesday at the Four Seasons Hotel in Newport Beach. Committee members, who sent out invitations "to anyone they thought would be interested" in supporting the cancer center through Circle 1000, expect about 300 to attend.

"I already have 25 underwriters for the brunch, people who gave \$1,500," Sewell says. "It's really rewarding to know there are that many people out there who care."

The featured speaker at the brunch will



BRIAN VANDER BRUG / Los Angeles Times

Sandy Sewell, chairman of Circle 1000: She beat the odds on cancer.

be actress Jill Ireland, National Crusade Chairwoman for the American Cancer Society, whose own experience with breast cancer is chronicled in her book, "Life Wish."

It is celebrities such as Ireland and actress Ann Jillian, Sewell says, who have helped bring the subject out into the open.

"People didn't talk about mastectomies 10 years ago," she says. "I was fortunate to

have a physician who counseled me not to change my life in any way: Don't change your clothing, the way you act around people, your sexual feelings about yourself or toward your husband." Still, she concedes, "no matter how much anybody tells you to keep it in the open, the biggest problem for a woman is a feeling of a loss of femininity. That's the struggle that faces a woman after this."

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Says Ewing: "Ten years ago there's no way on God's great earth I'd tell anybody I had cancer or was supporting a cancer group. But it's much more important to be open about it and to be willing to discuss it. Everybody needs to have a support group when they're going through this. I remember when John Wayne got cancer, it was the 'Big C' and nobody wanted to talk about the Big C. We want people to be aware that it is manageable and treatable."

The three-story outpatient cancer treatment center, which will be linked to Hoag Hospital by a pedestrian walkway, is designed for the convenience as well as the care of patients. It is scheduled to open in the fall of 1989.

"It will be so great because you won't have to go to Los Angeles or the City of Hope," Sewell says. "We're going to have the very best right here in the harbor area. A woman, or anyone, could be treated close to home. That's the whole reason I got behind it."

Although she underwent radiation therapy at Hoag Hospital 10 years ago, Sewell says: "People who need extensive therapy have had to go away from home in the past to one of the major cancer centers. Now Hoag will be a major cancer center in itself. That's the beauty of this, that they can be healed close to home where they have the support of their family and friends."

That's the main reason the Sewells donated to the Hoag Cancer Center in the first place.

"My husband's really good about supporting all kinds of things," Sewell says, "but he mainly did this because of me and how much it meant to me, and if I get cancer again I'd want to be close to home."

As chairman of Circle 1000, Sewell's message is simple.

"Don't be afraid of it [cancer] and seek help as soon as any abnormal sign is given because the early detection is the secret to its cure," she says. "Too many people are afraid. They don't want to know they have it. So my goal would be get more public education to seek early detection because it can be cured."