

Local Ovarian Cancer Survivor Gives Back to Newly Diagnosed Women

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Lehigh Valley Woman Starts First Ovarian Cancer Support Group In The Region

Allentown, PA -- ([ReleaseWire](#)) -- 06/26/2018 -- Donna Barats, a local Zumba instructor and 2-year ovarian cancer survivor, is offering a new, peer-led support group to make sure that other Lehigh Valley women with the disease do not have to face it alone.

Barats was diagnosed with primary peritoneal ovarian cancer in April 2016 and decided to start her group after realizing that there wasn't a single local support group just for women with this disease, which is the 5th leading cause of cancer deaths in U.S. women. Her support group meets monthly in Allentown, PA and is in partnership with SHARE, a national women's cancer support nonprofit.

Like many women with ovarian cancer, Barats was initially misdiagnosed and treated for months for a different condition. Early stage ovarian cancer is difficult to detect due to the absence of distinct symptoms. Most ovarian cancer is diagnosed at a late stage, but even these symptoms, including abdominal pain, bloating, and difficulty eating, are often easily misattributed to other health conditions. Of the 22,000 women who will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2018, about 14,000 will die from the disease.

When Barats finally started chemo, just days after her daughter's wedding, she began searching for a nearby ovarian cancer support group. "I wanted to talk to peers. I didn't only want to talk to someone to try to sympathize, but someone who was like me, who went through it," says Barats.

The only group she could locate had been defunct for years. Barats' students from the Zumba classes she teaches in Allentown were supportive, but she says there were still things that she knew only other ovarian cancer peers could advise her on. She promised herself that if she made it through treatment, she'd start her own peer support group.

"I felt responsible for helping spread awareness of ovarian cancer," she says. "Women hear so much about breast cancer and breast cancer awareness, while no one really talks about this other major disease. With ovarian cancer, on top of treatment and recovery, women can lose their reproductive organs and go through premature menopause. It's extremely tough."

When Barats finished treatment and decided to launch her group, she connected with SHARE, which trains and resources peer-led support groups.

"SHARE is excited to be able to come alongside and support someone like Donna, who is such an inspiring figure and is meeting a real need in the Lehigh Valley community," says Stephanie Blaufarb, Ovarian Cancer Program Director at SHARE.

In addition to peer-led ovarian groups, SHARE also offers webinars, Facebook Live events, an online community, tele/video discussion groups, a helpline, clinical trials education, Spanish-language support, and advocacy opportunities just for women affected by ovarian cancer.

Through her support group, Barats hopes to offer other women who have been recently diagnosed, or who are in or have completed treatment for ovarian cancer, the kind of support she wishes she had access to. Barats would like to extend opportunities for caregivers to receive peer-support, as well.

The Lehigh Valley ovarian cancer support group meets at Trinity Wesleyan Church, 6736 Cetronia Road, Allentown, PA 18106 on one Thursday each month from 7-8:30pm. The next meeting is August 2. Register at <http://bit.ly/LehighSHARE> or the Ovarian SHARE Helpline, 212-719-1204.

About SHARE

SHARE is a national nonprofit that supports, educates, and empowers women affected by breast or ovarian cancer, with a special focus on outreach to medically underserved communities. Its peer-model meets women wherever they are with the insight of women who have been there too, creating a nationwide community where no one feels alone. Its free services include in-person and virtual support groups, expert-led webinars and presentations, a national helpline, online communities, educational tools, advocacy opportunities, and survivor-patient navigation.

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