

# HIGHLAND PARK HOSPITAL: HealthSystem Supports Cancer Survivors

*A NorthShore University HealthSystem patient discovers how to cope after breast cancer through the LIFE program.*

Karen Sussman's cancer journey began when a routine mammogram revealed something suspicious enough to warrant a breast ultrasound. That was followed by a needle biopsy and a dreaded diagnosis. A bilateral breast MRI revealed that the cancer had spread to her lymph nodes.

Sussman moved quickly to find "the best surgeon and the best protocol" to beat the disease, and she was thrilled with the treatment from her care team, including NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) surgeon David J. Winchester, M.D., NorthShore oncologist Leon Dragon, M.D., and everyone in-between who got her through surgery, aggressive chemotherapy and radiation. Also, Sussman is grateful to the many members of her care team who helped her triumph over a diagnosis she initially believed could take her life "in a matter of weeks."

A self-described optimist before her diagnosis, Sussman went through treatment following all recommended protocols determined to beat the cancer. To the outside world, Sussman appeared to regain her positive attitude and her "bubbly, happy" self in spite of ongoing anxiety over her prognosis. But, when treatment ended, she had a difficult time finding her "new normal."

"I wanted to really live my life, rather than just to be alive," Sussman said. The Living in the Future (LIFE) Survivorship Program at NorthShore's Highland Park Hospital became her bridge to reaching that new life. "It's a magnificent program," she said.

For her, the program started with an individualized risk adaptive visit with Carole Martz, RN, AOCN, APN, who answered many of Sussman's questions. It also included seminars such as "Celebrate LIFE, Eat to Beat Malignancy and Walk Away from Cancer" and "Self Esteem and Sexual Intimacy After Cancer" with experts like LIFE Founder, Carol Rosenberg, M.D., as well as support groups.

"The LIFE Program offers so many opportunities to help make you whole again," she said. Meeting other cancer survivors

was particularly powerful for Sussman, who said the support group formed an immediate bond by sharing concerns about treatment, strategies to move forward and innermost secrets. "We gave the best of the best to each other," she said.

Since its inception in 2006, the LIFE program has completed almost 700 risk adapted visits and had more than 3,000 participants through free LIFE programs and seminars.

**"As part of our mission to serve the entire community, we believe we have to do our part in serving those who are traditionally underserved. Our partnerships with other important groups serving the health needs of the greater community are vital in this effort. A reflection of our commitment to these partnerships is our work with the Lake County Department of Health at the North Shore Health Center and now the North Chicago Health Center."**

Jesse Peterson Hall,  
President at NorthShore's Highland Park Hospital



*The Living in the Future (LIFE) program helped breast cancer survivor Karen Sussman bridge the changes in her life before and after her diagnosis and treatment, restoring her sense of well-being.*