



Barbara Kavanagh works tirelessly toward awareness, education and advocacy of multiple myeloma, cancer of the bone-marrow plasma cells. Her husband is in remission from the disease.

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'A little lady with a lot of power'

MYELOMA NETWORK FOUNDER SHARES KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHERS TOUCHED BY CANCER

A month before their wedding in 1991, Barbara and Jack Kavanagh learned he had multiple myeloma — cancer of the bone-marrow plasma cells.

It was scary news, but they were fortunate to be living in Boston at the time, where they had access to excellent medical care.

"He was diagnosed correctly and early," Barbara Kavanagh remembers. "The treatment of choice was chemo, and it worked." The couple learned a lot during that time.

Fast-forward 17 years: Her husband still is in remission and Kavanagh, a former social worker, has established the Arizona Myeloma Network, a support group for others dealing with the same type of cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 45,000 people in the U.S. are living with multiple myeloma and about 14,600 new cases are diagnosed each year.

After Jack retired from an international construction firm, the couple moved to Glendale and began seeing Dr. Rafael Fonseca at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale.

One day, Kavanagh asked her husband if there was something she might do to help.

BY SUSAN DITZ
Contributing Writer

"He asked me if I would put on a conference about living with the disease," she recalls.

That was in 2004. "We also had to put on a golf tournament to help pay for it," she says.

In the past four years, working out of her spare bedroom, Kavanagh has produced another conference (held last March) and several more golf tournaments. She also has gained a core group of volunteers, created a Web site, and begun seeking grants and sponsors.

"Our mission is to promote education, awareness and advocacy," she says. "We want people to know they are not alone, there is treatment and hope, and they can learn how

to be their own advocate and have a good quality of life."

A key element of the Myeloma Network's mission is outreach to underserved groups and minorities. The organization has a scientific advisory committee and is working with hospitals across the state. Kavanagh wants to build an infrastructure to allow the group to expand its scope of services.

Her experience in social work has come in handy. She conducted programs on team building, volunteerism, time and stress management at a number of colleges. She also co-wrote two books: "The New Volunteerism: A Community Connection" and "The New Partnership: Human Services Business and Industry."

"This is a little lady with a lot of power," says Myeloma Network board member Marilyn Eisenberg, marketing director of the Arizona Broadway Theatre. "Barbara is passionate, determined and tenacious. She can be at the supermarket and will recruit the checker into

joining her organization."

Recognizing that tissue sample donations are critical to ongoing research, Kavanagh won a grant last year from the Arizona Comprehensive Cancer Program to support a public relations campaign.

The Tissue Donor Awareness Project was launched with free daylong presentations to diverse focus groups in Phoenix, Prescott and Tucson. More than 500 patients, family members, health care providers and caregivers have learned how tissue samples are collected for staging and diagnosis, and why they are critical for diagnosing cancer and developing treatment strategies.

Since starting her efforts on a shoestring, Kavanagh has made many people more conscious of myeloma and other forms of cancer that don't get much attention.

"I believe that what Barbara is doing with this organization can become a national prototype," Eisenberg says. ♥