

Pink Ladies Website is one in 11.2 Million

A new website for local women with cancer is launched today and it promises to be packed with useful information. Catherine Kalamis logs on to find out who's behind the new venture.

WHEN you type the words 'breast cancer' into the Internet's Google search engine, you come up with a mind-boggling 11.2m hits.

But from today there is just one web address that Guernsey women diagnosed with the condition need to remember as a starting point for information.

At the stroke of midnight the Pink Ladies' new website went live and you can now log on at www.pinkladies.org.gg.

The site is the result of three months' work and is brim full of information, resources, diary dates and links to other sites of interest.

For some women it will banish the need for further treks along the information superhighway.

All the resources listed are local and it is very patient-friendly, although there is little in the way of heavyweight scientific or medical input.

Jo Alien, one of the founders of the charity that now has 80 members, said this was deliberate. 'It is more an information resource and does not go into treatments because it is such a huge area and it is different for every person.'

Most people diagnosed with cancer will turn to the Internet at some stage to look for information - and there are thousands of sites out there.

So, why another one?

Jo said: 'From the members' point of view, I think it is an easy way to access up-to-date information.

'More-recent members will be able to see all the newsletters and newspaper articles from over the years and there is a lot of information they can get from that.'

The site includes a number of special features. There is a general area which anyone can access that covers items from information about breast screening to the dates of support meetings. There is

information about books and a set of frequently-asked questions, answered by breast-care nurse Karen Leach.

But there is another section, for members only, which offers even more detailed information including contacts, a list of members, a newsletter archive and real-life stories from women who have lived through the experience of breast cancer. This section is password-protected but accessible when people join the Pink Ladies, which is free, although members are asked to make a donation of at least £1 per meeting.

A welcome message says: 'At whatever point in diagnosis, treatment or recovery you find yourself, you may be experiencing feelings of fear, shock and isolation.

'You may feel that you need someone to talk to about your diagnosis, treatment, or how to talk to your loved ones. 'We understand the difficulties you may be experiencing and would like to offer our support and friendship at this or at any time in the future.'

Jo explained: 'It is about what we can offer as a group and is very specific to Guernsey patients'.

There is even a shopping area, covering everything from head-scarves to fund-raising jewellery, and links to off-island mail order sites that members have found useful. There is also a forum in which members can leave messages and comments. And there is a photo album of memorable Pink Ladies events, plus a section on the charity's achievements.

The site has details of the different charity meetings - social, business and support - for those involved and a list of future events and speakers.

It is hoped that the website will appeal to people who don't like to - or cannot - attend meetings but still want to access local information.

Nancy Golland, another founder member of the Pink Ladies, who has been working with Jo on the website with its designer, Paul Falla, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000, just a couple of weeks before moving to Guernsey.

'I had my first chemotherapy three days before a very rough crossing to our new home and amazingly was one of the few passengers not to be sick,' she recalled.

She then had other treatment and said: 'I am well at the moment, leading a normal busy life. But I have to keep reminding myself to "stop and smell the roses", as a life-threatening diagnosis teaches you.'

Nancy said initially she did not use the Internet. 'I am more of a book person, but when I was com-piling the Pink Ladies resource box 1 started looking around and there is so much information that I think our own site is easier and less frightening for someone, particularly if she is coping with a new diagnosis.'

Jo agreed the new site was very user-friendly.

'The first meeting we had with Paul, he really understood what we wanted to achieve.

'He really just "got us" and what we were about.

'If you are just diagnosed you want to find out as much as you can,' she said.

'You can end up on a cancer-care site and not know where to start or which sites are good. This one points you to sites that other people have found relevant.

The website also addresses the issues of what happens when patients are referred off-island and what to expect.

'People can rapidly access it and get information and support and keep up to date.'

Paul said the website was his first major commission and he was pleased with the result.

'We started with something like three pages but now there are around 50.' Paul is a former Health Department employee but has now set up his own IT business.

Ms Leach said: 'The launch of the website is an important development in the growth of the Pink Ladies. This will be a fantastic resource for women and their family.

'It is a patient-led website so should provide relevant information support and encouragement for women of all ages.'

- Website designer Paul Falla, of Rockafalla Enterprises, can be contacted via rockafallas.co.uk.

(Reproduced courtesy Guernsey Press and Star)

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Welcome to our world



What is it all about then