

Pretty in pink

Breast cancer survivors are queen for a day as retailers give them a treat

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RAVAGED by breast cancer, these women have suffered from constant nausea and loss of hair. Some even had their breasts removed.

But for one day two weeks ago, five breast cancer patients were made to feel beautiful again, temporarily forgetting about their illness.

They were pampered with pedicures, manicures and facials, treated to nice meals and taken on a shopping spree – all for free, courtesy of AsiaMalls.

To commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness month this month, AsiaMalls and its tenants organised the Positively Pink event at Century Mall on 8 Oct.

Five breast-cancer patients were picked by the Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) to receive

the freebies worth \$6,000, including \$1,000 worth of vouchers each.

All the women are from households with a monthly income of below \$1,500.

An AsiaMalls spokesman told The New Paper: "We wanted to give breast cancer sufferers and survivors from needy backgrounds a treat to bring some joy into their lives."

Meaningful life

"We also wanted to convey the message to other sufferers that it is still relatively possible to lead an active and meaningful life despite being diagnosed with the disease."

To support breast cancer awareness, AsiaMalls and lingerie outlet E2 Lingerie began selling bras at a fair in Century Square since Monday. The sale will go on till 26 Oct.

From the proceeds, 15 per cent will go to BCF. The mall will top this up by 50 cent for every bra sold.

KERSTIN SOH, 24



SHE was in her early 20s and there was no history of breast cancer in her family.

So when she was diagnosed in January, Miss Kerstin Soh, 24, a trainee teacher, was shocked.

After surgery to remove two lumps in her right breast, the younger of two siblings had to undergo chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She is now on unpaid leave until early next year.

She tried to forget about her illness by immersing herself in work.

Reality sank in only when chemotherapy caused her to lose her hair and to suffer from fatigue and mood swings.

Looking back now, she said: "Breast cancer has made me a better person."

While she cared only about work previously, her family now comes first.

She lives with her parents, in their 50s, in a three-room HDB flat. Her father, a driver, is the sole bread-winner.

She has some advice for other young breast cancer survivors: "Always be positive and strong because as long as there's life, there's hope."

At Century Square two weeks ago, Miss Soh got a \$55 pedicure and manicure (above), her first.

"It feels good to be pampered," she said.

PICTURES:
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AZIZAH MOHD, 36



FOR most breast cancer survivors, the fourth year after they receive treatment is a time of uncertainty.

That's because typically, if there is no relapse after five years, survivors are considered cancer-free.

But fate dealt housewife Azizah Mohd, 36, yet another cruel blow after she was cancer-free for 4½ years. It returned.

The mother of two daughters aged 15 and 10 was first diagnosed with the illness in June 2002. After the lumps were removed, she was given the all-clear by her doctors.

But the tumour reappeared in December 2006 and then again last year and in July this year.

She is now undergoing her second round of chemotherapy and gets about with the help of a walking stick and, at times, a wheelchair.

What keeps her fighting against the disease is her family, especially her children.

She said: "My girls are so young, so of course I want to fight this and see them grow up."

Her husband, a fitness club supervisor, earns \$1,400 a month. The family lives in a five-room flat. At Century Square two weeks ago, they were treated to a Japanese meal.

RAHMAH ANES, 49



FOR part-time masseur Rahmah Anes, 49, shopping is a rare treat. So she was delighted to go on a shopping spree at Century Mall with \$500 worth of vouchers she received from AsiaMalls.

Ever the loving mother, Madam Rahmah, who has two sons, aged 19 and 23, and a 14-year-old daughter, said she used most of the vouchers to buy clothes for children.

Looking at her smiling face, it's hard to imagine that she once struggled with depression. Her world came crashing down when three lumps were discovered in her right breast in 2005 and she had to undergo a mastectomy. For two months after surgery, she avoided people and stayed at home.

"I didn't want them to see me as 'crippled'," said Madam Rahman, who lives in a four-room HDB flat with her 57-year-old husband, a cleaner.

Apart from breast cancer, a blood clot was found in her throat in 2006. Last year, her womb had to be removed due to a growing fibroid.

But she managed to overcome her depression after she became a volunteer with BCF. Talking to other breast cancer survivors gave her support and helped her regain confidence.

At Century Square, she quickly picked out a shawl in pink, the colour of the breast cancer awareness campaign. She said with a smile: "Pink is for survivors and I've been one for three years."

Free scans



Radiographer Chia Li Yong (right) explaining the screening process to five women who will be receiving free screening at Yishun Polyclinic. ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

A SLEW of activities is taking place across the island to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Needy women between 50 and 70 were given free mammograms at the Yishun Polyclinic yesterday. The scans were sponsored by medical company Carestream Health.

Fifty such women, who are in a high-risk age group, will receive the scans over a two-week period.

At Century Square in Tampines, five breast cancer patients from needy backgrounds were treated to a day of shopping, dining and beauty treatments yesterday. The event was sponsored by mall management and tenants.

According to the National Cancer Registry, 1,300 women were diagnosed annually with breast cancer between 2003 and last year.

APRIL CHONG

FEEL-GOOD MONDAY
STORY TO CHASE AWAY THE MONDAY BLUES

The Sisterhood of Paddlers

JAMIE KOH

IN HER own words, Mrs Priscilla Lee, 58, used to be a "very sheltered housewife".

"When I got married, I stopped contacting all my friends and ex-colleagues. I talked only to my family," she told *my paper*.

She focused all her energy on her husband and three sons - until she discovered a lump in her breast in 2002.

She tested positive for Stage 1 breast cancer shortly after, and that "changed her life".

After a depressing period which included surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatment, Mrs Lee picked up dragon-boat racing in 2003.

It was introduced to her by the Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF).

"Dragon boating was one of the recommended exercises to

reduce arm swelling," Mrs Lee said.

It did more than that for her - not only did she regain her confidence, but she also gained physical and mental strength and the activity gave her "a life".

Yesterday, five years on, Mrs Lee, as part of team Paddlers in the Pink, rowed her heart out in a dragon-boat race as part of the two-day Sava Sprints.

They were one of two teams fielded by the BCF and they also took part in a special flower ceremony - pink roses were strewn into the Bedok Reservoir - in remembrance of those who have died of breast cancer.

The other team, Hope in the Boat, took first place in the competition, which was part of WaterFest 2008.

As one of the "about 20" pioneer team members, Mrs Lee has made many close friends through the sport.

She feels that "we are all pad-



ROWING FORWARD: More than 40 breast-cancer survivors singing at the flower ceremony at Bedok Reservoir yesterday. (PHOTO: JAMIE KOH)

dling towards the same goal - the goal of being healthy and well."

The team also welcomes

Mrs Eelman, also a breast-cancer survivor, takes inspiration from her teammates, whom she calls her "new family".

Said Ms Angelina Ong, 53, the chief executive of dragon-boat service provider Sava, who trains and manages the two teams for free: "Dragon boating is the most remarkable thing that has happened for many of these women."

"It has given them a new lease of life, a strong social support group and amazing friendships."

"Dragon boating is a godsend for them."

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Chemotherapy:

化学疗法
huà xué liǎo fǎ

Remembrance: 记忆 jì yì

Vivian calls for regular breast cancer checks

Go for regular checks for breast cancer.

That was the call by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, yesterday at the launch of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

According to statistics from the National Cancer Registry, 1,300 women were diagnosed each year with the ailment between 2003 and last year.

Within that period, breast cancer had overtaken lung and colorectal cancer as the top cancer killer among women, claiming 313 lives a year.

Even more worrying is the fact that a survey last year revealed that only 41 per cent of women aged 50 to 69 had gone for a mammogram in the previous two years.

Doctors recommend that women between 40 and 49 have themselves checked once a year. Those aged between 50 and 69 are advised to go for twice-yearly screenings.

In both categories, early detection could result in a higher likelihood of successful treatment.

Subsidised mammogram screenings are available at all 15 polyclinics and on the mammogram bus.

Through the BreastScreen Singapore scheme launched in 2002, a subsidised mammogram costs \$50 for citizens and \$75 for permanent residents.

"Please go for mammograms. It's subsidised, it's available, it's accessible," Dr Balakrishnan urged.

Dhany Osman

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