

■ **HEALTH/Surrey man now helps out others facing disease**

# Breast cancer: Men get it too

"Breast cancer in men? You're kidding, right?" That's the response I got during my informal survey. I chatted with several male friends and none of them knew men also get breast cancer.

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Now Contributor

It's not just a female disorder. Men have breasts too, although it is rare for them to develop cancer in their breast tissue (less than one per cent). Males of any age can develop the disease, but it's more commonly diagnosed in men over 60. Ray Rix of Surrey was 67.

"I was showering one evening and felt a lump in my breast. I thought it was weird and showed it to my wife," recalls Rix. "She told me I'd better go see the doctor."

Men have very little fat around their breasts, so a lump is easily detected. Unfortunately, men don't think to check for lumps or be concerned with them, believing breast cancer is only a woman's disorder.

"Early detection gets it done," says Rix. He's glad his wife suggested he visit his doctor.

Men can develop all the types of breast cancer women get; however, the most frequently diagnosed breast cancer in men is in the breast ducts (ductal carcinoma). Common symptoms include a painless lump in the breast area and a discharge from the nipple. The Canadian Cancer Society assures these symptoms aren't always due to breast cancer, but a visit to your doctor is certainly advisable.

A biopsy confirmed Rix's cancer. He had a mastectomy, was prescribed Tamoxifen (an estrogen blocker) and had aggressive radiation for 16 days. Fortunately for Rix, he suffered no reactions to the radiation and his recovery was smooth.

"They did lots of scanning afterward to make sure they got it all," says Rix, adding there was some concern about removing lymph nodes. "The cancer got into seven or eight of my lymph nodes in my armpit and they took those out. The consequences of removing these can cause problems, but I healed quickly with no complications."

Risk factors for male breast cancer include family history, carrying the BRCA2 gene mutation, occupational factors or exposure to chemicals and radiation, taking estrogen for other disorders, and a very rare disorder called Klinefelter's syndrome (having an extra X chromosome in all body cells).

Rix has a history of cancer in his family. Both his sister and brother are also cancer survivors. And after recovering from breast cancer 10 years ago, Rix had another cancer scare. This time it was skin cancer.

"I had a growth on my ear three or four years ago," he said. "But they removed it

and I'm fine now."

Today, at 76, Rix enjoys good health and an active life. He and his wife follow good nutrition practices and enjoy hiking and camping – anticipating an upcoming hiking trip in Australia. Rix had physiotherapy after a hip replacement and hired a personal trainer for five sessions, to help him get his strength back. He still trains regularly. "I have muscles on my body that I never found before!" he laughs.

Rix suggests men do self-examinations and have regular physical checkups. And if you find something strange don't ignore it, he warns, "Ignorance is a fearsome thing."

Rix volunteers with the Canadian Cancer Society's CancerConnection Program (1-888-939-3333). The service matches trained volunteers with those who've had a similar cancer experience.

"We give them support and make them feel better," explains Rix. "And being a volunteer makes me feel good that I can do something good for someone else. I'm also getting a pretty good education about this kind of thing," referring to all the types of breast cancer he's learning about.

Rix is also learning much about the mind with his training as a CancerConnection volunteer and after dealing with his own emotional healing. He credits the women in his life for teaching him how to confront emotions. He's amazed at their openness.

"The wonderful thing about women is they know how to get right into your heart." Men just don't share, says Rix. "Breast cancer is such a rare thing for men to get and men don't like to talk about things like that, anyway. We sort of bury ourselves in our misery."

Most men are worried about the cancer recurring or about dying from it and Rix is grateful he can be a sympathetic ear to those concerns. Because male breast cancer is so rare, Rix doesn't have many clients, but he's comforted several men across Canada.

Volunteers are advised to be anonymous and not release their phone numbers, but Rix admits he "plays it by ear" using his own discretion. "My very first client was a guy in Newfoundland. I was born in a fishing town – Prince Rupert – so we became good friends. We send postcards to each other."

When Rix was diagnosed with breast cancer 10 years ago, he was told he was one in a million. Today, this caring man is still one in a million.

For more information on breast cancer in men, visit [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca).

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