

GUEST COMMENTARY

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

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Almost everyone knows someone who has had to cope with breast cancer in some way. Whether they are a family member, friend, or casual acquaintance, the diagnosis can be frightening. If you or a loved one are worried about developing breast cancer, or if you know someone who has been diagnosed with the disease, it is best to get as much information as soon as possible.

Every year, October is designated as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month organization's Web site at www.nbcam.org, is a great resource.

Breast cancer is the second most common form of cancer in women in the United States, and is the second leading cause of cancer death in women. According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 192,370 new cases of breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among women in the United States in 2009, and an estimated 40,170 women are expected to die from the disease. Additionally, an estimated 1,910 new cases of breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among men. But there is good news. There are about 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States today.

The most common signs of breast cancer are a lump in the breast, abnormal thickening of the breast, or a change in the shape or color of the breast. However, finding a lump or change in your breast does not necessarily mean you have breast cancer.

According to Health Net Federal Services, www.healthnetfederalservices.com, a majority of breast lumps are not life threatening. In fact, breast lumps found during breast exams are often diagnosed as benign. Non-cancerous breast lumps are most commonly caused by fibrocystic changes. Symptoms include premenstrual swelling, irregular or lumpy texture, and constant or occasional breast tenderness or fullness. Eating a low-fat diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, avoiding caffeine and reducing salt intake may provide relief.

Although many breast lumps may be non-cancerous, lumps or tender breasts may also be a sign of breast cancer. Additional symptoms include a lump in the underarm that lasts through the menstrual cycle, an area that is clearly different from any other area on either breast, a change in the feel or look of the skin on the breast or areola, or discharge. Contact your health care provider immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

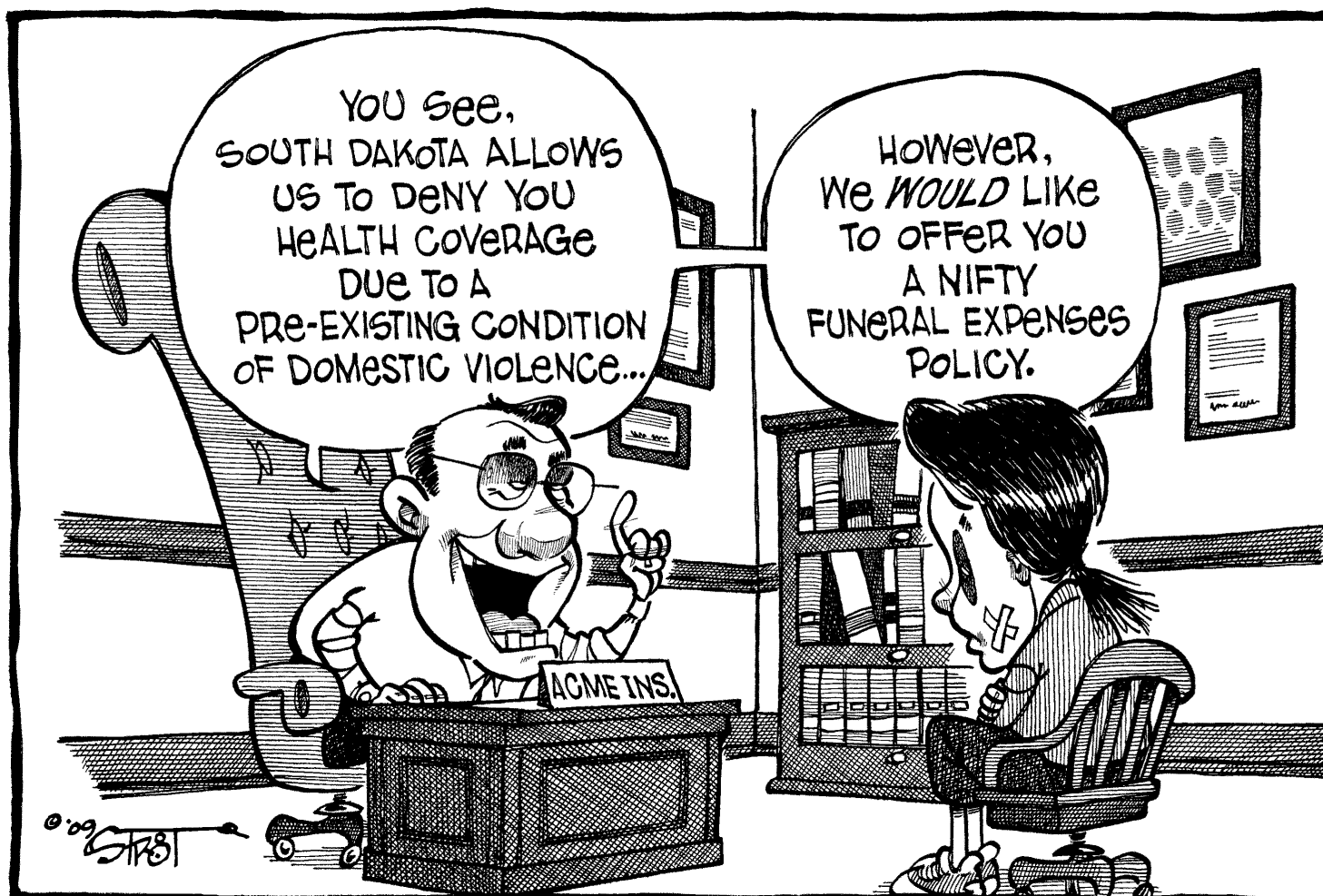
It is important for women to practice the elements of good breast health. Mammography screening remains the best available method to detect breast cancer early. One of the earliest signs of breast cancer can be an abnormality that shows up on a mammogram before it can be felt. Early detection of any type of lump is critical for successful treatment.

Mammograms, along with clinical breast exams, self-exams and general breast awareness, are the most effective ways to detect breast cancer early. Start conducting monthly breast self-examinations by age 20. A clinical breast examination as part of a regular health exam by a healthcare professional should be performed every three years.

Annual mammograms are recommended for women starting at the age of 40. However, women with a family history of breast cancer should talk to their health care provider about when they should begin having screening mammograms or additional testing.

There are other things you can do to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. According to a recent article in The Breast Journal, smoking 100 or more cigarettes may substantially increase a woman's odds of developing breast cancer. Therefore, a female smoker can reduce her risk of breast cancer by quitting smoking as soon as possible.

Additionally, www.dietandcancerreport.org reports that nearly 40 percent of all breast cancer cases in the United States could be prevented if women kept a healthy weight, drank less alcohol, exercised more and breastfed their babies, and that 70,000 breast cancer cases could be prevented in the United States alone every year.



Hospice and respite care adds shine to the golden years

There were a lot of women's voices at our place when I was trying to get some last-minute shut-eye.

The reason was Avera Sacred Heart Hospital's hospice and respite care program bringing nurses, aides and retired volunteer nurses altogether to help Phyllis and me in our dilemma.

I thought that hospice was the end of the road program – but I was wrong. Instead, it is to make the golden years better for all of us.

On account of the deterioration of my Parkinson's "look alike" disease, they bathe me, dress me and get me ready

for the rest of the day in a wheelchair. It's come to that already!

Phyllis, who is learning the nurse's trade, gets the additional advantage of the respite part of the program. (She spent a couple of days in Sioux Falls with a girlfriend while I was in respite care in the hospital.)

Bob Karolevitz

Writer At Large



check my Coumadin level (that's a blood thinner) which has to be done once a month.

The volunteers read to me because in addition to having Parkinson's disease, I've got something called convergence insufficiency which causes my eyes to NOT focus properly up close. But I can still dictate my column.

Thank goodness for nurses, aides and volunteers because without them there would be no hospice or respite program to free up Phyllis to give her some time off!

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It's going to be a great day because I'm giving it all away

There's a note on my driver's license that says, "Donor." It used to say "Eye Donor," but I have graduated to donating all of my organs to someone in need when I kick the bucket. Nothing to lose. Everything to gain.

I know it might sound a little odd, but I'm excited about being an organ donor. I like the idea of someone else seeing better, feeling better or living better when my time comes.

Now that I'm giving it all away, I have a warm fuzzy feeling knowing others will have my heart, heart valves, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas, intestines, corneas, skin, bone and/or connective tissue; although, they may not want my heart with its murmur, leaky valve and aneurismal aorta.

What made me decide? My brother-in-law Tony is alive today because of an organ donor. That convinced me to be a donor, too.

I went online to organ-donor.gov and I learned some amazing facts – like donating my organs, bones and tissue could save or improve the

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Paula Damon

lives of as many as 50 to 60 people. Wow, who would have thought I had that much life in me

I also learned that at any given time nearly 80,000 people are waiting for organs. Every 13 minutes, a new name is added to the national waiting list and 16 people die every day waiting for organs.

On the Web site organ-donor.gov, I registered with my state's donor registry by printing the South Dakota Resident Organ and Tissue Donor Form. I filled it out and mailed it to Department of Public Safety, Driver Licensing Program, 118 West Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501-2000. It was that simple!

I printed a donor card at www.organdonor.gov, and with Brian as my witness, I signed it and kept it in my

wallet.

If you don't have a Brian to be your witness, ask around: a family member, a friend, the mail carrier, the UPS driver, the garbage man, your next door neighbor, a Jehovah's Witness at your door, the kids playing street football out front, your Avon lady, the meter reader, your Mary Kay representative or the Boy Scout selling popcorn.

Next, I designated my decision on my driver's license when I renewed it.

Signing this form means when I die, a donation coordinator will obtain my medical history from my family and conduct tests to see if my organs will work in someone else's body. Then, all my good stuff – organs, bones and tissue – will go to someone in need. (Yee haw!)

The second best part of

this gift of life is that it will not cost me a penny, since all organ donation expenses are covered by the transplanting geniuses. I am not cheap, but I like a good bargain.

Every day is a great day, knowing my organ donor status is marked on the bottom right-hand corner of my driver's license. Is yours?

(For more information about organ donation, please call 1-888-5-DONATE or 1-888-5-366-2833 and follow the prompts.)

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@uwnet, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com <<http://www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com>> and find her on Facebook.

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- In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.
- Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted.

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