

CHEEKY LIBRARIAN BLOGS HER CANCER EXPERIENCE

by Elizabeth Kumru

Teresa Hartman has a definite sense of purpose and a quirky sense of humor.

In the spring of 2006, when she was diagnosed with a rare cancer in her left cheek, she reacted in typical librarian fashion, except one with an attitude.

Associate professor and head of education at UNMC's McGoogan Library of Medicine, Hartman treated her adenoid cystic carcinoma as any other resource she came across – as an educational tool for medical students and the public.

“Something good had to come out of this. I had to leave a trail,” she said.

First, she made sure that students from every discipline were involved in her care.

“When will they have an opportunity to see this rare cancer again? I'd rather have an impact on student learning,” she said.

Next, she turned to the Consumer Health Information Resource Service (CHIRS), a free library resource that she has been promoting since her arrival at UNMC in 1999. But, since she didn't trust herself with computer searches, she asked colleagues at the library to gather information about the disease for her.

“I didn't need to read about other people's bad experiences. I wanted unbiased information,” she said.

Then, she started her first personal blog called “The Cheeky Librarian.”

It's not a rant or a pity party. It's practical and realistic, just like the author, and full of useful information.

“I don't give recommendations about anything. I share what's happening to me, provide links to valid resources and give people the opportunity for feedback,” Hartman said.

Cheeky Librarian chronicles her journey through treatment, multiple doctor visits and test results. She gleans the best tips found in the mounds of information from the CHIRS search.

“CHIRS is a great service. UNMC was on the leading edge, and still is, when the library began offering this resource to the public in 1984,” Hartman said.

It was through that information she learned details of her disease and treatment that physicians don't always tell their patients.

She learned that saliva has a protective quality for the teeth that she would lose after surgery and treatment, so her dentist provided fluoride trays, which she used twice a day to strengthen her teeth.

“I didn't know spit had so many good uses,” Hartman quipped in the blog on Aug. 2, 2006.

Hartman blogged her feelings as well, describing “meltdowns” and what she did to counteract the psychological toll of cancer.

In anticipation of radiation eliminating her sense of taste, Hartman toured her favorite restaurants, concentrating on the Mexican and Thai cuisines. And she was silly – distributing glow-in-the-dark bracelets to coworkers so they could “glow” with her after her radiation treatment.

“It's good to play once in a while,” Hartman said.

While treatment was successful, she began experiencing dizzy spells in October 2007. Naturally, she feared the cancer was back.

Tests revealed a benign lesion the size of a pearl stuck between the inner and outer bones of her skull, above and behind the left ear. She called it an “alien.”

Surgeons implanted a titanium plate to cover a hole in her skull from the operation.

Hartman is healing, and no, she's not setting off magnetic alarms in stores.

She's still cheeky.

Check out Hartman's blog at:
<http://cheekylibrarian.blogspot.com>

CHIRS: www.unmc.edu/library/consumer
or call toll free 866-800-5209.

