

# Learning to Talk About Cancer

## How one group worked at the Ted Mann Family Resource Center.

*Bob:* “I was angry. Everybody told me to be upbeat with her. It’s hard to be upbeat with your wife who has cancer. I’d smile with her and then I’d go and cry.”

*Gloria:* “The biggest change? Bob and I don’t sweat the small stuff. The stupid things we used to bicker about, they aren’t important now.”

*Stacey:* “I saw from the beginning Steve was in denial about how serious my cancer was.”

*Steve:* “I was doing the male thing, being the hunter-gatherer of factual information for my wife. I didn’t know how she felt.”

Gloria and Bob, Stacey and Steve: Two married couples, both women with breast cancer, all four wanting to do what was best, none of them knowing what that was. But, as it turned out, they discovered where to find it.

They found what was best at the Ted Mann Family Resource Center at UCLA’s Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center.

There, they and four other couples joined a support group. The women all had breast cancer. They were getting good medical care. What they wanted to work on was relationships, how best to support each other with words and actions in a time of stress and need.

“We established a community of people sharing a common experience who are members of a club they didn’t want to join,” says Joel Adelman, one of the group’s facilitators and a licensed clinical social worker.

Ricki Bernstein, also a licensed clinical social worker, was the group’s other facilitator. She observes that by the sixth and last 90-minute session, “The men were more open and the women were more able to explain their needs.”

Because of their common situation, members of the group, who ranged in age



From left: Dr. Anne Coscarelli, director of Ted Mann Family Resource Center, with group

from their 30s to their 60s, talked in a deeply meaningful and intimate way. They related to their tiny community as they could relate to no other. “Members lightened their load in the group,” Adelman says. “It provided liberation and empathy that are healing.”

Bernstein notes that, “Overall, at first the men were somewhat reluctant, though curious, not feeling they would have been there had their wives not asked. The women were eager and very appreciative of a group including their husbands because they all felt the men were carrying a tremendous burden and had no outlet for their feelings.”

To start most sessions, everyone met for about 45 minutes and picked a topic, such as anger, fear, role changes. Then the men and women separated, Bernstein meeting with the women and Adelman with the men. Everyone got back together for 15 or 20 minutes at the end of the evening to discuss what had happened.

“When the men split off from the women, they were in their own group and, once there, they were very expressive,” Adelman says.

Steve, 38, a colorist for a movie studio, says, “My relationship with Stacey absolutely changed. I love her more. And we’ve

found more comfort in talking and acting openly and effectively.”

His wife, Stacey, 37, who is a flight attendant, offers an example: “One night in the group I started to cry, and said I just want Steve to hold me like a baby. I had never been able to say anything like that before. Every single night since then he has held me — every single night.”

Bob, 51, is a salesman for a hardware manufacturer. He has known Gloria since they were in the sixth grade, though they were married only five years ago. Bob says he got “a rude awakening” in the group. “I was angry, not at Gloria, but because I thought she was spending a lot of time away from me, talking about her cancer with friends and relatives. I felt neglected. In the group, I grew to understand it was good for both of us to let other people help Gloria. Before, I’d been putting them off.”

Like others in the group, Gloria, 52 and a bookkeeper, feels more comfortable being open with her husband than she did before. “We talk. We know and appreciate things about each other that we never would have known except for the group. We’re closer, we love each other more. Nothing could be more important to us.” ★

## Services of the Ted Mann Family Resource Center

For more information, please call the Center at (310) 794-6644.

**Insights Into Cancer:** free monthly evening lectures on cancer-related subjects by experts in the field

**Reflections:** a boutique offering products to assist in physical appearance changes (including wigs, hats, scarves, breast prostheses)

**Counseling:** short-term counseling for individuals and family members

**Lending Library:** educational materials, including books, pamphlets and videotapes on all aspects of the cancer experience

**Newsletter:** articles related to educational information about cancer, coping and center activities

**Web site:**

<http://CancerResources.mednet.ucla.edu/> – archives of past newsletters, information about living with cancer, center activities and links to other resources

**Groups and Classes:** opportunities to give and receive support as well as learn about living with cancer. Among more than a dozen groups and classes are “Mind-Body Approaches to Coping with Cancer,” “Women Together — for women with breast cancer,” “Healing Through Art,” “Among Friends — for women in treatment for all types of cancer,” “Grief Work” and “Couples Together” Please call the Center at **(310) 794-6644** for dates, times and enrollment information.

## Ted Mann

Ted Mann, former president of Mann Theatres, philanthropist and long time supporter of the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center and UCLA, passed away on January 15, 2001 from complications related to lymphoma.

Mr. Mann, through the Ted Mann Family Foundation, has supported psychosocial care at the Rhonda Fleming Mann Resource Center for Women with Cancer since its inception almost a decade ago. In honor and in memory of his commitment and the continuing commitment of his family foundation, the center, located in 200 UCLA Medical Plaza, has been renamed the **Ted Mann Family Resource Center**.

For more information about Mr. Mann and the center, please see <http://CancerResources.mednet.ucla.edu/> on the Web. For a tribute to Mr. Mann, click on “Information Resource” and then on “Tribute to My Favorite Mann.”

We shall deeply miss Ted Mann’s sage advice, strong personal support and warm friendship. —Dr. Anne Coscarelli, *director, Ted Mann Family Resource Center*