

CONFERENCE REPORT

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust 'Let's Meet 2011'

When Jo Maxwell died of cervical cancer at the tragically early age of 40, her husband James translated his grief into action and founded a charity in her memory. Some 13 years on, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust – the only charity in the UK for women with cervical abnormalities and cancer – recently held one of its annual 'Let's Meet' days for women, their family and friends at the Thistle Birmingham City Hotel, Birmingham, UK on 15 October 2011.

You might think that with the shadow of cancer underpinning the day, the mood would be solemn. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, there were tears. Yes, there was anger – often, it has to be admitted, against clinicians who while providing superb medical care, sometimes failed to relate to patients on a more human level. But these expressions of emotion only served to fuel the determination of patient participants to make their cancer journey as positive as possible, and of those health professionals present to support that journey.

The day was introduced by Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Director, Robert Music, who spoke of the progress made in the past year: a campaigning partnership with Mumsnet; a cinema advertising campaign to encourage women to

attend for screening; the introduction of a new helpline; and the launch of locally-based support groups.

Next was keynote speaker Jo Judges, Development Manager of Macmillan Cancer Care Solihull and Birmingham. Jo's presentation focused on survivorship and living with cancer. She stressed that now, with cancer treatment giving hopeful outcomes, health services need to offer both medical and emotional support not only for those in treatment but also for survivors. The possibilities she outlined seemed both useful and timely, so it was doubly sad that her words brought a flurry of participant outrage that they had not been supported even half as well as Jo was suggesting.

After which, and for the rest of the day, delegates attended their choice of workshops, ranging from alternative health practitioner Amanda Ody's presentation on how acupuncture can help reduce the side effects of cancer treatment, through to more mainstream medical sessions such as 'Ask the Gynae-Oncologist'. Nor, happily, was the emotional side of cervical conditions ignored; a workshop for partners and family members was paralleled by one on the impact cancer has on personal relationships.

The day ended with a plenary of three personal accounts from patients who have been motivated to help Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust by fundraising, media appearances, lobbying, moderating the website and running the support groups.

The whole day was both moving and inspiring. But there was also a clear message of how useful Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust's website and helpline are to patients with cervical abnormalities and cervical cancer and, of course, to us health professionals who so lack the time and resources needed to support those patients. Note to all Journal readers: keep Jo's Trust details available on your desk, and pin their posters up in your waiting room!

FURTHER INFORMATION

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust (<http://www.jostrust.org.uk>) is the UK's only charity dedicated to those affected by cervical cancer and cervical abnormalities. It offers a range of online and face-to-face support and information including: information materials, a helpline (Tel: 0808 802 8000), an online forum, local support groups and an 'Ask the Expert' service. Go to <http://www.jostrust.org.uk/support/letsmeet> for more information on 'Let's Meet 2012'.

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