



The Cancer Warrior

Andrea Ivory, founder and executive director of the Women's Breast Health Initiative in Florida, goes door-to-door helping poor, uninsured women get lifesaving mammograms

BY ERICKA SÓUTER

It certainly wasn't the typical reaction to a breast cancer diagnosis. "There was no 'Oh, my gosh! Why me?'" recalls Andrea Ivory of the moment a mammogram revealed suspicious findings that ultimately led to a breast cancer diagnosis in August 2004. "This was my 'Aha' moment." A commercial real estate broker at the time, she had been on a quest to find her life's calling. "I was reading books like *The Purpose Driven Life*, waiting for some big thing to reveal

what I should really be doing," says Ivory, 53.

So shortly after having a bilateral mastectomy—a procedure that involves the removal of both breasts—she joined charity walks and became a mentor for other newly diagnosed women. Still, she longed to do more. "I prayed on it and had an epiphany: Start a nonprofit that fights breast cancer one household at a time," says Ivory, who runs the Women's Breast Health

Initiative (WBHI), an organization committed to educating uninsured women about breast health with a focus on screening women 40 and older.

She and her team provide early-detection guidelines and sign up those eligible for free mammograms, which are later administered at a mobile mammography van in the neighborhood. "We are warriors for the population that falls through the cracks," proclaims the mother of one. "You see these women every day. Some of them work two or three jobs, but they still don't have health insurance. They just can't afford it, but they make too much to get Medicaid. That means most of them have never been screened."

The consequences are deadly. The death rate from breast cancer for African-American women ages 35 to 44 is twice that of White women the same age, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Since Black women tend to have more aggressive breast cancers, and at younger ages, mammograms are a critical procedure.

Ivory herself was saved by early intervention. Though the National Cancer Institute does not recommend yearly mammograms until age 40, her doctor recommended that she start at age 35 due to her history of fibrocystic breasts (benign lumps). Black women in the poor South Florida communities that WBHI serves are not so fortunate. "Women are needlessly dying, even

though no woman has to die from breast cancer," says Ivory, who has plans to expand her organization in 2012. Since 2006, WBHI has provided more than 1,000 mammograms, which have led to eight lifesaving cancer diagnoses. That's twice the national average. "When found early, breast cancer is treatable and beatable," she says. □

BREAST CANCER CARE OPTIONS

Get a free or low-cost mammogram.

Contact the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure organization for help (komen.org).

Locate a patient navigator. These advocates eliminate barriers to timely diagnosis and treatment regardless of your ability to pay. Talk to your doctor about finding one near you or contact the American Cancer Society (cancer.org).

Sign up for a clinical trial. Participating in trials can ensure that you get the benefit of the latest research and medical breakthroughs. Learn more at breastcancertrials.org.

Negotiate medical costs. If you have a financial hardship, ask the doctor, hospital or billing manager for a discount in return for paying cash, or request a payment plan. —E.S.