

Stepping out to fight cancer

Participation in walk the right medicine for Wendy Macleod

By Katie Stewart, Ottawa Citizen April 17, 2010



Photograph by: Julie Oliver, The Ottawa Citizen

Wendy Macleod is battling cervical cancer, but vows to take part in the Weekend to End Women's Cancers on June 5 and 6. 'It signifies a start. I will be cancer free,' she says.

At 48, Wendy Macleod was ready to start a new life.

After being diagnosed with fibromyalgia four years ago, she retired from working at the Justice Department and adjusted to living with her disease. She had also recently left a 13-year relationship and moved out of her home with her 15-year-old daughter.

But in November, Macleod had to face another diagnosis. She had cervical cancer.

Her first thought was how to tell her daughter. She quickly realized she had to stay positive.

"I sat her down and told her that there's a high surviving rate and that I am going to beat this."

Her daughter was devastated and is going to counselling to help her through this difficult time. And Macleod feels she has to stay strong for her.

"I just can't let it hit me. I can't risk breaking down in front of her," she said, trying to hold back tears.

Macleod spoke to the Citizen before her radical hysterectomy last Wednesday. The surgery would remove her uterus, fallopian tubes, cervix, and at least one ovary. The procedure has a six-to-eight-week recovery period, which involves a period of time in intensive care and bed rest and will be followed by radiation therapy.

Macleod notes that the survival rate for cervical cancer is 75 per cent, but it's difficult for her not to wonder occasionally whether she will be part of the 25 per cent. But in between her worries about the future, she remains optimistic and ready to take on cancer.

"You never know how much time you've got left," said Macleod. "I've decided I'm going to live my life as full as I can. If I have 50 years, it will be a wonderful 50 years. I am not going to waste one minute. Not one."

With that in mind, Macleod has signed on to walk in The Shoppers Drug Mart Weekend to End Women's Cancers on June 5 and 6. All proceeds go the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation.

"In this community, there are close to 6,000 people diagnosed with cancer each year," said Linda Egan, president and chief executive officer of the foundation. "This event draws close to 4,000 people and the money raised will support research, care, the purchase of equipment and many other initiatives that will help women in Eastern Ontario."

Macleod is no stranger to charitable fundraisers, having participated in the CIBC Walk for the Cure and the MS Bike Tour. But this one will mean so much more.

"It's so important for me to try and finish it. It signifies a start. I will be cancer free. I can say 'I beat this, I'm going to make it,' " she said.

She is looking forward to being surrounded by other strong women who can celebrate her victory and truly understand what she's been through.

"Just to turn to someone and say, 'I beat cancer' and have them say 'I did too' will be the most powerful feeling in the world."

People who want to sign up for the walk or donate money to Macleod or other walkers can go to www.endcancer.ca for more information.

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