

# PATHWAYS

## A Study of Breast Cancer Survivorship

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

WINTER 2017

### Zero Breast Cancer

By Catherine Thomsen

About 3 million women living in the United States have received a breast cancer diagnosis and most no longer receive active treatment. One of the goals of Zero Breast Cancer (ZBC) is to translate new knowledge that comes from research like the Pathways Study into useful messages to help those who have or had breast cancer live the healthiest possible life. It is my honor to lead these programs. In one current project, we are collaborating with patient navigators, social service and support group representatives, a UCSF researcher, a physician and a surgeon to explore how to better help women with limited resources transition out of breast cancer treatment and get the medical care and other support that they need.



As part of the Pathways Study continuation, we will be forming a new advisory committee to provide input on Pathways activities, and I am excited to facilitate the new group. This is a great opportunity for us to get input from some of you, the study participants, on what issues are most important to you, as well as when and how you want to receive information. This fits very nicely with my aim to engage and empower breast cancer “survivors” to become advocates for their own health. Together, we will use the findings from Pathways, as well as what we know from other experts, about how to reduce the chance that breast cancer could return and to improve health and wellness during and after treatment.

We hope that you will work with us to improve the lives of women everywhere who have had breast cancer. ZBC is also working with young girls and teens to reduce their risk of breast cancer later in life. As we move forward, we will share new materials on our website. Please take a look at [www.zerobreastcancer.org](http://www.zerobreastcancer.org) and follow us on Facebook and/or Twitter (@zerobreastcancer, note spelling!).

#### **\*New\* Pathways Advisory Committee Forming**

Your ongoing participation has been so very valuable to us, and now we would like to invite your thoughtful opinions and ideas for future survey questions and other activities. Please consider joining our new advisory committee, if helping us generate additional questions that are of interest particularly to breast cancer survivors such as yourself sounds like something you would like to do. Our long-time study partner, Zero Breast Cancer, a much respected advocacy group, will be joining us in building and organizing the committee and its activities. Meetings will be held quarterly at Kaiser Division of Research in Oakland. We are across the sidewalk from a BART station and can provide parking vouchers at a Kaiser lot. Committee members will include our own Larry Kushi and Marilyn Kwan, and other community members and care providers.

**If you are interested in participating, please contact us at 1-866-206-2979 or via email at [pathways@kp.org](mailto:pathways@kp.org) by March 1, 2017. ✉**

## Higher Vitamin D Levels Associated with Better Outcomes in Breast Cancer Survivors

*Results from Kaiser Permanente researchers contribute to a growing body of evidence that vitamin D plays an important role in breast cancer*

Women with higher vitamin D levels in their blood following a breast cancer diagnosis had significantly better long-term outcomes, according to new research from the Pathways Study researchers at Kaiser Permanente and Roswell Park Cancer Institute. The study was published in JAMA Oncology.



“We found that women with the highest levels of vitamin D levels had about a 30 percent better likelihood of survival than women with the lowest levels of vitamin D,” said Larry Kushi, ScD, research scientist with the Kaiser

Permanente Northern California Division of Research and principal investigator of the Pathways Study. The current study included 1,666 Pathways Study members who provided blood samples between 2006 and 2013.

Vitamin D is a nutrient best known for its role in maintaining healthy bones; conversely, vitamin D deficiency has been associated with the risk for several cancers.

Common sources of vitamin D include sun exposure, fatty fish oils, vitamin supplements, and fortified milks and cereals. While the mechanisms for how vitamin D influences breast cancer outcomes are not well understood, researchers believe it may be related to its role in promoting normal mammary-cell development, and inhibiting the reproduction of and promoting the death of cancer cells.

With funding from the National Cancer Institute, the Pathways Study enrolled Kaiser Permanente members in Northern California who had a diagnosis of invasive breast cancer from 2006 to 2013. Participants provided blood samples within two months of diagnosis and

answered questions about diet, lifestyle and other risk factors, with follow-ups at 6 months and at 12, 24, 48, 72 and 96 months.



In addition to lower overall mortality among all participants studied, the researchers found even stronger associations among premenopausal women. Those in the highest third of vitamin D levels had better outcomes than those with the lowest levels of vitamin D, during a median follow up of 7 years.

Although the study did not examine the effects of vitamin D intake from foods versus supplements, Kushi noted that the study supports the recommended daily levels of vitamin D (600 IU for those 1 to 70 years old and pregnant or breastfeeding women, and 800 IU for those over 71 years old).

“The more we know about vitamin D, the more we understand that it may play a key role in cancer prevention and prognosis,” Kushi said. “This study adds to the evidence that vitamin D is an important nutrient.”



This study is part of Kaiser Permanente’s ongoing efforts to understand the complexities associated with breast cancer survival and outcomes. For example, last year Kaiser Permanente researchers found a lower risk of recurrence in patients who

breastfed and among those with specific HER2 positive tumors. In addition, in two separate studies published in 2013 researchers found that breast cancer survivors with strong social networks had a lower risk of mortality, while those who consumed high-fat dairy products had a higher mortality risk. ❖



## PATHWAYS STAFF

### Maruta Blatchins



Maruta Blatchins recently graduated from the University of Toronto with a double major in Neuroscience and Psychology. Upon completing her studies in Canada, she moved to the Bay Area, and joined the Pathways team in September. In the past, Maruta has enjoyed volunteering at a

variety of organizations, including the Geneva Centre of Autism in Toronto, and is looking forward to seeking out similar opportunities in her new life on the West coast. Maruta loves to read, interact with animals, and explore the diverse natural environments and landscapes of California. ☒

### Aleyda Solorzano

Aleyda Solorzano joined Pathways in October. She has a MD degree from El Salvador School of Medicine and brings to the study experience



as a general medicine doctor. She enjoys cooking and baking, growing orchids and vacationing with her family up in the Sierras in winter. ☒

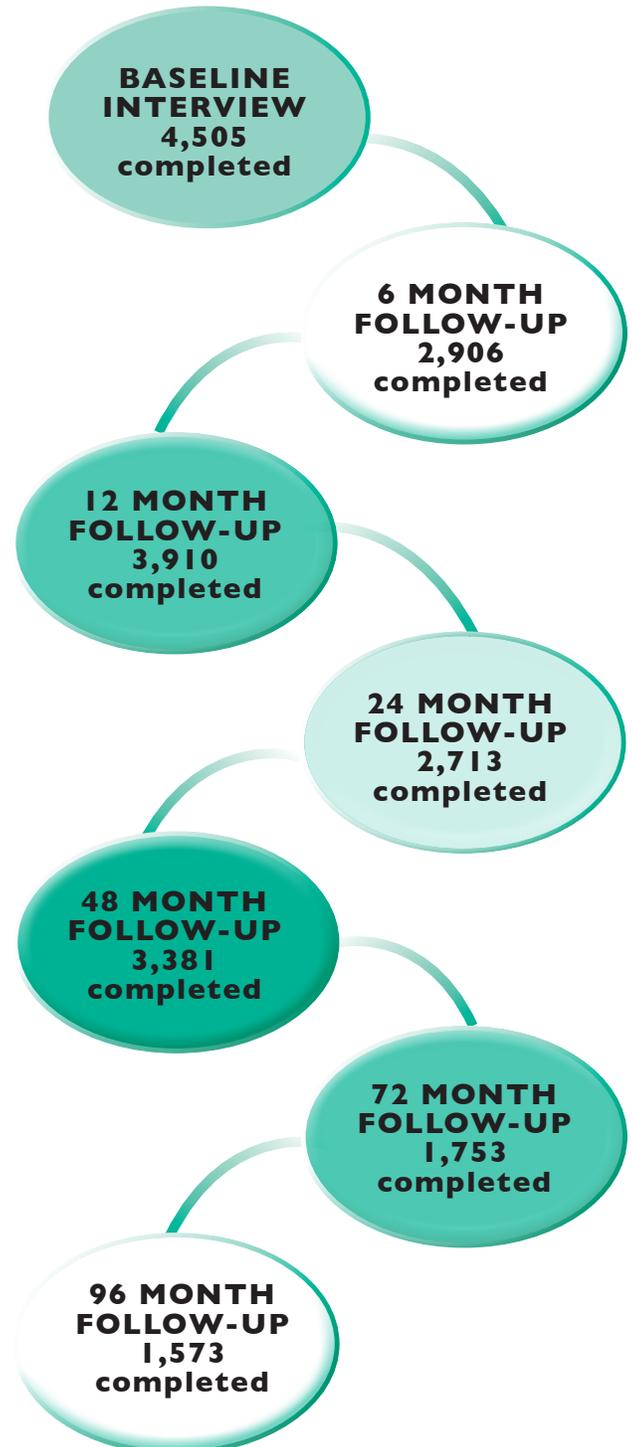
For the most up to date information on the Pathways Study, please visit our website: <http://pathways.kaiser.org> or ☒

### New Contact Information?

In order to keep in touch with you we must have your latest contact information. Please let us know if your phone number or home address has changed.

You can reach us by calling our toll-free number **1-866-206-2979** or emailing us at [pathways@kp.org](mailto:pathways@kp.org). ☒

## Pathways Update: Who is Participating?



We are grateful for your role in the Pathways Study. All of you add meaning and diversity to our team, and contribute your unique perspective to the information we are gathering.

Thank you for participating! ☒



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