

Team Shan...self care breast health messaging for young women

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Caught between childhood and adulthood, adolescents and young adults (AYA) are often misdiagnosed or ignored in cancer prevention and early detection messaging. Referred to as the forgotten generation, the 15-39 age trajectory is far too frequently misdiagnosed and diagnosed late with cancer. Mortality rates have not changed in decades, cancer is often very aggressive in this population at risk and no routine screening is available. Cancer awareness is an identified gap in the AYA cancer continuum.

In an effort to reach young women with their breast cancer risk and breast health information, Team Shan Breast Cancer Awareness for Young Women (Team Shan) has developed an effective social marketing strategy to reach this population at risk.

Team Shan is named after Shanna (Shan) Larsen. Shan was only 24 when she lost her life to breast cancer. Shan's symptoms were repeatedly misdiagnosed and she was diagnosed late with metastatic breast cancer. Shan's Story has resonated with young women, they have thanked Team Shan for sharing and appreciated not being forgotten in breast cancer messaging.

Team Shan breast cancer awareness campaigns and education activities are facilitated in communities and on college and university campuses across Canada. Team Shan campaign activities include public transit and billboard marketing, traditional and social media advertisements, print resource distribution, website and complimentary presentation and event activities.

Team Shan shares breast cancer facts, risk factors, signs and symptoms along with self care strategies. Understanding their breast cancer risk is a first step to self care. Informed young women can make controllable life style choices that will impact their health over time. One out of nine women in Canada will face breast cancer in her lifetime.

Young women also need to know their bodies and their breasts...how they look and feel. Self care involves knowing what their normal is and checking their breasts often to watch for changes. Knowledge of breast cancer symptoms and self checks empowers young women to seek appropriate medical assessment when their normal changes.

The response from young women to Team Shan campaigns has been very positive. They have understood their risk, increased their breast cancer knowledge, taken action and shared information learned. *"This is an excellent way to inform young women on the risks of breast cancer and help them to be able to check for symptoms before it is too late."*

Young women diagnosed with breast cancer have also responded. *“In Shan’s memory, I would perform self-exams on a fairly regular basis. The only reason I did these exams was because I would remember Shan, and the billboards and your messages on FB from the group...The happy news is, because I did regular exams, I found it very early...Thank you for running programs in Shan’s memory. Thank you for reminding me that it is not just a disease of older women. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”*

Team Shan is realizing their goals to increase early detection and help improve outcomes for young women diagnosed with the disease. In Shan’s memory young women are encouraged to take care of themselves.