A dear friend of mine who lost her battle with ovarian cancer said, "Cancer equals waiting." You are either waiting for doctors’ appointments, tests, results of those tests, treatments, and results of treatments. This is a stressful time for the patient, their family members, and friends. I would therefore like to provide them with something pleasant to look at and reflect on during those often difficult moments. —Judy House

This quote, taken from the Healing Quilts in Medicine (2006a) Web site, is the foundation for the vision of Judy House, a well-known quilt artist who died in her home under hospice care after a nine-year battle with breast and ovarian cancer.

“Judy was just one of those special patients that you always remember,” said Carlton Brown, PhD, RN, AOCN®, one of Judy’s chemotherapy nurses and former head nurse at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC.

Steve House, Judy’s husband of 40 years, said that “Judy was a Navy wife and former nurse who saw many military hospitals over the years with rather bleak surroundings. She wanted to provide something whimsical and pretty to brighten things up for other patients going through treatment and the staff.”

Judy’s priceless legacy of Healing Quilts in Medicine provides healing from those stressful times through the beauty of the quilts and stories behind each one.

According to Healing Quilts in Medicine (2006b), the subject matter of the wall hangings includes plants, such as the sweet potato, the may apple, Pacific yew, and periwinkle that form the foundation for chemotherapy treatments for a variety of cancers. Each wall hanging has accompanying educational material and suggests a pleasant and peaceful setting to the viewer.

**Impact at Walter Reed**

I chose the Madagascar periwinkle plant, used in two drugs (vinblastine and vincristine) to treat certain types of leukemia, as the background canvas of my quilt. The words are the focal point to inspire and challenge the patients, families, friends, and staff of Walter Reed Army Medical Center to do whatever is necessary to fight a horrible disease. —Sandi Goldman

*Encouraging Words* by Sandi Goldman. Image courtesy of Healing Quilts in Medicine.

*Encouraging Words* is one of the quilts in the inpatient oncology ward at Walter Reed where Jeannie Lamb, BSN, OCN®, is the current head nurse. Lamb said that “the quilts have had a very positive impact on our patients and caregivers” and, because the quilts are exhibited throughout the outpatient and inpatient treatment areas, “we often see people stopping in the halls to read the stories of the quilts and admire the colors and plants of chemotherapy. The quilts really stand out, and they are even more beautiful in person than the pictures on the Web site.”
Patients often require lengthy hospitalizations and, according to Lamb, they enjoy the beauty of the quilts in their rooms.

Lamb was involved in developing policies and procedures for infection control and preservation of the quilts. When Walter Reed merges with National Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD, in 2011, Lamb will be involved in assuring that the quilts remain intact and remounted in the cancer care areas of the new facility. This concern was first expressed by Steve House.

“Judy would talk for hours on the phone helping guide women through the ups and downs of cancer,” said Steve.

Judy was a consultant to a local American Cancer Society “Why Me” program and a resource for the national organization.

“She was not physically strong enough to do the quilting for the project, but she went to all the meetings and gave instruction,” said Steve, who continues to answer e-mails from the Web site about Judy and the project.

Expanding the Program

When I saw this image of mutterkraut at the first meeting of the Healing Quilters, I knew this was the plant I would use. The image conjured up happy times of daisy fields and children picking wild flowers to make bouquets for their moms. I wanted to create something cheerful that would provide a brief respite from the worry and boredom that comes from sitting in a sterile hospital waiting for tests and results.

When I received the invitation from Judy to participate, I was thrilled. What an honor to be in this incredible group of quilters. They share a special bond—a love for Judy and her dream for the patients at Walter Reed. —Lisa Ellis

In addition to handling the administrative tasks of the Healing Quilts in Medicine project and Web site, Lisa Ellis is working with other art quilters to carrying on Judy House’s vision at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center. Elaine Sims, Director of the University of Michigan Health Systems’ Gifts of Art program (www.med.umich.edu/goa) said that the arts in health care program was specifically designed for the new hospital that opened in 1986, replacing the 1925 hospital. “The program was created to enhance the environment of care and help the healing process,” said Sims, who coordinates numerous other music and art projects at the University of Michigan.

Sims explained that the Society of Arts in Healthcare (www.thesah.org) is a national organization that supports projects across the nation. A traveling exhibit of healing garden quilts toured the nation from 2002–2005. The 27 quilts in the tour were created by northern Virginia quilters in memory of Lenore Ann Parham, a quilt teacher who lost a four-year battle with ovarian cancer in 1997. Sims reports that the Healing Quilts in Medicine art quilts from Ellis and the other quilters will be a welcome addition to the University of Michigan. Ellis said that the University of Michigan art quilts followed the same guidelines set by Judy House for Walter Reed.

“Judy would be very proud of the new set of beautiful and inspiring quilts and that her legacy and vision continues on,” said Ellis.

Conclusion

This quilt is for my beautiful friend Judy, who taught me the important things I need to know about quilting and friendship. —Elizabeth Byrom

Some of the 37 quilts from the original Healing Quilts in Medicine project will be featured in future Heart of Oncology Nursing features in the Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing. Judy House, her caregivers, and the quilters illustrate one of those special stories that help oncology nurses continue to do what we do.

Author Contact: Barb Henry, APRN-BC, MSN, can be reached at mhap65@ucmail.uc.edu, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org.

References
