

# Dating and Disclosure

Transcript of  
Empower Teleconference I  
Monday, March 19, 2007

**Presented By:**



**Linking Young Jewish Women in Their Fight Against Breast Cancer**

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I want to welcome everybody to Sharsheret's first Empower teleconference for Jewish single women living with breast cancer. Tonight's teleconference will be transcribed and posted on the website. I assure you that no names will be included and I want to emphasize that. Also, following my presentation we will have time for questions and answers, discussion and, again, to secure privacy and anonymity please do not share your name prior to speaking.

I received several questions that I wanted to start with:

- "When is the right time to talk about having had breast cancer at all?"
- When would it be appropriate to give more specific details regarding treatment choices and fertility?
- How do you not fall apart when someone rejects you only because you were sick, even though it's over?
- Where can you find a guy who will be OK with all this and do you have his number?"

I will try to address all that. I don't think I can guarantee you a guy and his number but other than that I think I can address that. I received another list of questions having to do with self esteem, fertility, sexuality and also somebody was saying something about bones aching from Tamoxifen. I'd like to go through the presentation and then following that I'll open it up for discussion

More often than not, Jewish culture strongly encourages people to date for marriage rather than casually dating. The Jewish circles are small. The implications can feel overwhelming. Going home for holidays or the Sabbath provides a breathing ground for people to ask, "So, are you dating?" Or to make comments like, "Are you being too picky?" You don't necessarily want to disclose to them, however, you may be feeling uncomfortable with people filling in the blanks. Given the fact that the Jewish social circles are small, women also fear that once their breast cancer history is disclosed publicly, the options may narrow.

If you are participating in the teleconference this evening, you already know that survivorship does not come without its side effects and there are physical and emotional repercussions that influence new or ongoing relationships. There may be expectations and pressures for you to re-enter your life just as you left it before the diagnosis of cancer. I suspect that some women and their loved ones secretly hope that they would go back to life as they knew it. That somehow if they would have been able to hit the pause button, have cancer, then hit play, putting them right back where they left off prior to the diagnosis. But unfortunately, as I'm sure you all recognize, this couldn't happen. You are not the same person you were prior to the diagnosis – how could you be?

Having cancer is a big part of who you are, or were, and it shaped who you have become. It may take time to figure out who your new self is prior to being out there on the dating scene. Someone once said to me that she couldn't meet the "right man" until she became the "right woman." She needed to take the time to figure out who she was and who she had become. When you are ready to re-enter the world of dating, when do you tell the person your history? How do you share the information? The goal of tonight's teleconference is to identify the challenges with being a single, young survivor and becoming comfortable with your new physical and emotional self, becoming more at ease with yourself and your story and knowing when and how to disclose.

I'd like to start off with some common concerns. The first has to do with your identity and appearance changes. Historically, physical developmental changes are often a bonding experience among girls and women as puberty is a much-anticipated time for pre-adolescent girls. Everyone has their "when I got my period for the first time" story. What is menstruation like? Will I get it the same time as my friends? Will I be the same age as my mother when she first got it? Am I like everyone else? The heart of adolescence is a time of heightened hormonal and physical changes, a time when we begin to connect with our sexuality, our sense of femininity, how we view ourselves as the female gender, how we are perceived by others. And, again, our experience is driven by, "Am I like my peers? Is this normal? Am I normal?" Adulthood is also a time when the undercurrent of hormones influences our experiences. Women share camaraderie over PMS symptoms and by speaking with each other we normalize these hormonal experiences. In each of these milestones we have role models: mothers, aunts, older sisters and cousins. We rely on family and friends to help us navigate the unknown journey through these milestones.

When a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer it immediately catapults her out of normalcy and she no longer feels like other women. Her self definition is dramatically altered. The progression through life's milestones becomes unknown, physically straining, and emotionally laden and, in many cases, there is no one to model after. A diagnosis of breast cancer is pervasive and it impacts the self image, body image, sexuality, fertility, pregnancy, and dating. For the Jewish single woman in particular who may one day cover her hair after marriage, wearing a wig for the first time due to the side effects from treatment is a disappointing experience. There is also the fear of the unknown. How do you confidently disclose your history of breast cancer when many answers remain unknown? Will fertility be a problem? Will there be a recurrence? Will the genetic mutations be passed to your children? These questions fuel the thought of who would want me now? Many women also fear that a history of breast cancer is more often than not a deal breaker. There are also fertility concerns, sexual concerns. There may be a pull to be more socially isolated and withdrawn. Your peer group may not understand what you may be experiencing though they try hard to be understanding and many of your peers have

progressed through milestones naturally without having to take a detour with cancer. It may be hard to be with friends if they date, marry, and have children without complications.

I've also heard women talk about feeling guilty on several levels and the first has to do with going on the first few dates and not disclosing immediately. The guilt is in response to feeling like you are hiding a dirty secret. I've also heard women talk about feeling guilty about what they are bringing to the relationship, possible infertility, a "damaged body," the possibility of future recurrence or financial strain due to medical bills. Finally there's also the fear of rejection and one Sharsheret caller said, "It's funny, I can look cancer in the face and yet I'm scared to deal the fear of rejection over something I had no control over." I would like to address these concerns and perhaps to encourage you to change how you are thinking about these things and though you may not have control over the cancer and the side effects of treatment, you do have control over how you think and live with the breast cancer history.

Let's start with readiness to date. Cancer and its treatments can impact the way a woman views herself. A lot of times, I'm sure many of you have heard the expression, "establishing a new normal," and maybe what you liked before is no longer what interests you now. It's important to be open to the changes. Also you need to decide, what things do you have control over? How can you think and feel about yourself? And is there a way to minimize this and maximize other qualities? It's also important to assess your readiness to date. It's almost impossible to expect another to see you as whole, desirable, sexual or even marriageable if you yourself are not convinced of this.

First of all, it's important to focus on the things that haven't changed. For example, some positive influences from your upbringing: your character, your humor, your talents, your skills, your intellect, your beauty. Focus on the things you learned about yourself as a result of living with cancer: your courage, your inner strength, your patience, perhaps a dark sense of humor, a different appreciation for life. I would suggest maybe as an exercise for yourself, and not to necessarily submit it, but to write a personal ad for yourself. When I've spoken to women about doing this it's been a very challenging thing. If you, yourself, can't have a self definition it's going to be hard to be out there in the dating world.

It's also important to do things for yourself that will boost your self esteem. Wear clothing that helps you feel confident and include good nutrition and exercise to help influence how you feel about yourself. The American Cancer Society has the Look Good, Feel Better program. I encourage you to look at that. I also would encourage you to make sure that you are doing lymphoedema management and taking care of that and just to engage in feel good activities.

Most importantly, be patient with yourself. If there were issues prior to cancer,

either with the body image or dating, those issues can still very much be present. Try to identify the negative thoughts and try to replace them with positive ones. Molly Ivins who was a journalist who was diagnosed with breast cancer wrote, "Another thing you get as a cancer patient is a lot of football coach patter. You can beat this. You can win. You're strong. You're tough. Get psyched. I suspect that cancer doesn't really care whether you have a positive mental attitude or not. It just sits in there multiplying away whether you are admirably stoic or weeping and wailing. The only reason to have a positive mental attitude is that it makes life better. It doesn't cure cancer."

It's important for you just to reframe things for yourself and how you're thinking about it. For example, how are you perceiving your body? I'm sure for most of you, even before diagnosis of cancer, you may have complained about the flaws in your body. Most women do. Somehow you were able to live with these. Although surgical scars or even internal changes or more significant changes in terms of femininity are magnified, it's important to make peace with your body and to own your body without shame. Try to remember that your body supports your healing process. Try to focus on the areas where people do compliment you the most. Rely on your support network. Participate in activities and social events, not necessarily dating specific, where you can elevate your self esteem by surrounding yourself with people who love you and appreciate you. The more you're engaged in this, the more momentum you build as you approach dating. It's also probably a good time to re-evaluate some toxic relationships as well.

Once you've gotten to a place after re-evaluating and assessing your readiness to date, it's important to focus on disclosure. Everyone enters a relationship with the unknown and it's a gamble that we take. Again, let's try to reframe this in your mind and change how you're thinking about it. When we think about dating it has to do with the chemistry between two people. Each person brings in different elements. Sometimes when the elements are combined there is a favorable reaction. However, sometimes when elements are combined the results are unfavorable. It's important for you not to see your cancer history in a vacuum. Remind yourself that he, too, is coming with elements that affect the chemistry between you. When two people marry there are a myriad of unknowns that will never be addressed: fertility, health, coping skills, finances, job assurance, in-law relationships. Yet, these unknowns are hardly discussed and the couple proceeds anyway. Perhaps there should be a similar game plan for you. Neither of you can predict the future so attempting to focus on the unknown will only perpetuate distance from one another. Another way to approach this is to focus only on what is actually known. What are some of those things? A diagnosis of cancer didn't destroy you. In fact, it was manageable. Women are living very fulfilling lives and getting married and having children after cancer. You know how to navigate the health system and you also will be carefully monitored in fact, more so than those women who are currently healthy so if anything were to arise it would most likely be caught early.

I also would recommend preparing an information packet that describes your particular type and stage of cancer and to go to some of the survivorship websites, like LiveStrong. When you're disclosing it may be something you want to consider giving at the time of disclosure because you want to be able to have more control over their first impression of cancer. As we all know, once they find out, they are more likely to then go and start Googling and searching and, the internet can be a very scary place to be. If you have control over a first impression that might be helpful. Paige Tolbert, from Sloane- Kettering Post Treatment Centers, suggests that upon hearing a disclosure a person falls into one of three groups. For one third, the disclosures will be a deal breaker, no matter what; for one third, disclosure will have little impact on whether or not to continue dating; and for one third, disclosure could go one way or another depending on how and when it's disclosed. And, how you disclose is as important as the information itself. You set the tone. One woman shared that it's when and how you reveal your most intimate secrets, not the secrets themselves, that matter. Tell these things in a calm, non-dramatic manner.

I strongly recommend, first of all, that you don't have another person disclose for you, whether it's a friend, a matchmaker, a parent, a sibling. You want to be in control over your information. Also I would recommend role playing with a friend or a family member to get comfortable telling your story. This will help when you are a bundle of nerves at the time of disclosure because you'll be working off a well-rehearsed script. There's also no right or wrong time to disclose and it doesn't also have to be all at once. Many professionals who have worked with single cancer survivors suggest disclosure by the fourth date because by this point you know whether or not there is potential and you haven't become too emotionally attached that he would feel as if you have withheld from him. Paige Tolbert also finds in the dating and disclosure workshops that people report they are so eager to disclose that they have a tendency to blurt out the information. She suggests that you contain this blurring syndrome because it never works.

Paige also discusses the dance of the seven veils. She came up with that because one woman in her workshop said when she would first meet someone they would say, "Oh, gee, why the cane?" They thought it was maybe some skiing accident or something because she was youthful and good looking and she would say, "I've got a hip problem." Then maybe the second time she would meet them, she would say, "I had surgery." And then the third time she would say, "I had something removed." And the fourth time she would say, "I had cancer." Now, I'm not suggesting that you should slowly disclose over a couple of dates, but I think the point that this example illustrates is that even when you disclose and when you choose to do it, you don't have to give them all the information at once. You could think about that in terms of any issue that you would be presenting.

Paige also goes on to say that you don't have to do the blurring because you don't have to view your cancer history as a shameful secret. She urges people to view their cancer history as something private and intimate as opposed to shameful. It's about your history. You have private and intimate feelings about your childhood, about your family. Your breast cancer history is private and intimate. It's an important thing you went through so you want to share it with someone who has earned the right to hear something so private about you. It's not something you have to apologize for. Also, we find that cancer survivors have a sort of fantasy that nobody else has anything to apologize for or to worry about. You have to remember that there are other things that people bring to the table.

Humor also seems to be another opinion when breaking the nervous tension that people seem to get when the word "cancer" comes up. Most people just don't know how to react and that makes them uncomfortable. By showing them that you can laugh about it makes them relax a bit and they can see that it's not something that they have to tiptoe around. Plus, it shows that you have a great sense of humor and that is very attractive. Someone told me about a college student diagnosed with cancer who once said, "I suppose you could tell people that you're taking a semester off to experiment with drugs." To use that line to break the ice and then he would disclose the reason he was doing lots of drugs was because of cancer. Sage Bolte from Life with Cancer Inova Cancer Services in Virginia, suggests to put yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you react? What would you want to know and not initially know? Much like everything else in this crazy cancer world, individual responses vary enormously. Most young people are somewhat unprepared to hear from an apparently healthy peer that cancer is or was a part of their lives and so they react oddly. Don't read into feelings and actions that are not reciprocated immediately. You have had time to digest what you have experienced. Remind yourself that this is the person's first time hearing the information. It's also possible that your sensitivity may be impacting your judgment about real or perceived rejection.

John Gray whose book, Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, equates dating to a job interview, putting forth your best foot, with the goal of positive dating experiences in mind. Dr. Gray encourages survivors to bare their personalities but not their medical histories in the infant stages of dating. That way when the subject of cancer later surfaces, the other person can weigh that revelation against many other qualities and not make the stay or stray decision based on one, albeit important, disclosure. It's not a betrayal to reveal to someone you're a cancer survivor, Dr. Gray says. These are personal issues. These are not things you should be saying on your first or second date. Don't sabotage yourself by thinking you're damaged goods and putting information out there inappropriately, which would be in the beginning of a relationship. The experience of being a cancer survivor is a very personal experience. You have

to get yourself out there. You may feel more vulnerable than the average person but you also may be stronger because you've had cancer and can see life a little clearer.

In terms of sexuality, whether it's now or at a later time, it's really important to give yourself time to get to know your new body. Spend time, feeling comfortable with some of the scars. If you are with a partner, again whether that's now or later on, give your partner time to get to know your body as well. If being naked is uncomfortable at first, you can wear silky lingerie that can stay on and also to be aware of lighting. You can dim the lights. You can use candles. In terms of vaginal dryness, there are a lot of lubricants on the market, so I encourage you to keep trying different ones when the time is right. The most important thing is to communicate your needs. That's true, even where couples where both people are healthy. It's important that you communicate your needs and let your partner know where you're at.

In addition to connecting with your partner it's also important to connect with yourself. Choose just a couple of friends with whom you can share openly. Again, you don't have to feel obliged with every friendship that everything has to be processed and talked about. Even if you just have a couple of friends where you're sharing more intimately, I think that that might work for you. Also choose, again, activities that you enjoy. I also encourage you to go to the websites, Planet Cancer and RealTime Cancer. These two particular websites are geared for young adults with cancer. These are not specifically breast cancer and it's for men and women. I certainly would suggest looking at their websites and perusing the forum and the blogs. Obviously it's always important to make sure you're following up with your doctors.

How can Sharsheret help? There are programs out there for young adult survivors. But what makes Sharsheret unique is that we are geared to address the unique needs of young Jewish single survivors. Some of the things that we have are the Link Program, where you can call and speak to either Ellen or myself and we will find you another woman with a similar background and a similar breast cancer history who could address your particular concerns and questions. I also encourage you to use the Forum, on line, where you can post a question or some thoughts and engage in an on line dialogue with other women, [www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org).

We also have a booklet series that you may find helpful, *The Jewish Woman Facing Breast Cancer*. We have one booklet on genetics; we have one booklet for family members. I certainly encourage you to look at that. We've also done some previous symposia and I encourage you to go on line and to go to some of the transcripts that can be downloaded having to do with hormones, genetics, survivorship and those are also easily accessible. And then finally we also have a Family Focus program where family members are invited to call and speak with



Ellen or myself to address their questions and provide appropriate resources.

We're also about to launch a program called *Sharsheret Supports*. *Sharsheret Supports* is a program we're starting for women who want to start support groups. Even if there is a support group that's already in existence, *Sharsheret Supports* will provide guidelines and information on how to start a group, how to maintain a group. If that's something that any of you would be thinking about please call, again, Ellen or myself and we can talk more with you about that.

In conclusion, the most important thing is for you to remember is that you should enjoy your life and to date whenever you feel ready and confident to date. When the time is right to tell the guy about your past, you'll know that. I also, again, would encourage you to be comfortable with your own story and most importantly, to trust your gut feelings. I would also recommend finding an inner peace for yourself. A Sharsheret caller had emailed me the following: *"My therapist told me a way to achieve inner peace was to finish things I had started. Today I finished two bags of potato chips, a lemon pie, a fifth of Jack Daniels and a small box of chocolate candy. I feel better already."* Celebrate survivorship. You earned it. I'm going to open up now for questions and comments. I'm going to just ask two things. One is that you keep your comments and questions broad so that everyone can benefit from them. If you have something to add after I respond certainly jump in and do so. And, again, we're going to ask that you not use your names for privacy and confidentiality.

Does anyone have any thoughts or questions?

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** There's a lot of dancing around when you talk about the issues of dating, not to mention that there aren't so many people who can really talk about it. I think something that gave me a lot of peace was that someone who had been dating mentioned that she felt like a lot of the relationships didn't fail because of the cancer but they would have failed because of other issues. Which seemed to be a comfort to me and I think – as I only have been able to date one person since my diagnosis and that was a mess and I think I was trying too hard to make something work but it wasn't the cancer that was the downfall of that relationship.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I think that's an excellent point because, again, that goes back to a re-evaluating toxic relationships and a lot of times people will hang. Everybody comes in with issues whether it has to do with weight or finances or job or education or background. People have things and when something doesn't go right in a relationship we tend to hang our hook or hat on those particular hooks that are relevant to us, even though it may have nothing to do with that, and cancer happens to be one of those hooks. I don't want to say that cancer is not an issue for people out there who you may be dating. It very well

may be but I also feel that that gives you information about who that person is. Even if it's just the cancer, it's already giving you enough information about that person.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I just wanted to pipe in and say, thank you because the presentation was very clear and concise and gave a lot of – gave me a lot of strength.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Oh good. Thank you.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** And I wanted to just mention, one of the things you were saying was the first step before dating would be to re-evaluate your readiness to date. I would assume that there might be certain symptomatic signs that maybe one needs to sort of take stock of to determine whether they're ready or not. And I wanted to know if you had any ideas about that?

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Go back to the whole idea of writing a personal ad that you're not submitting. Are you challenged with that or is it coming easily? The other thing that I would ask is even if the words are coming easily, as you're writing it are you feeling guilty by not including the cancer piece? Because I think that if you're feeling guilty, again, it goes back to this being something shameful or this being something – like some dirty little secret that you're not telling. If you can come to terms with the fact that, again, this is something that's intimate and private rather than shameful, I think that that can help you in terms of – or at least partly help in terms of assessing whether or not you're ready to do this, if you're not convinced that's going to bleed through to the dating experience.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Right.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** If you're not convinced that you're strong enough to go on, is that what you mean?

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** No. You need to be convinced that there was nothing shameful or that there is nothing shameful.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** That you're a courageous woman and that you can – OK, I understand.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** You really need to believe that because if you don't, how can you reasonably expect somebody else to believe it?

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** It's kind of what they say, even when you haven't had cancer. You need to be comfortable with yourself and who you are before you can date someone seriously and be with them.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Absolutely. That goes back to what I said earlier in terms of you can't meet the right man until you become the right woman. Oftentimes if you gauge your dating history, a lot of the time you can look at the men that you dated and the relationships were not successful and in some ways they're a mirror image of how you were feeling about yourself at that time.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** It's a bit like what I've heard and read, that two individuals must enter a relationship as 100 percent, not 50 – it's not half but whole.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right. Because somebody can't fill that in for you. But I don't know if people necessarily can achieve 100 percent.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Well more closer to completeness.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Exactly. I agree.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I mean you bring that complete – that level of – that completeness that you've attained into a relationship.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right. It's hard, I would imagine, to feel complete after you've had some very radical surgery.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I think that's a really good point because that in itself will determine whether one is ready. Because surgeries themselves, depending on whatever everybody's been through, whether it's lumpectomies or mastectomies or reconstruction, that in itself is – in a sense you've become complete once you're done with the surgeries. A single especially has to really feel complete and that they're done, they're happy, they're comfortable with where they are because if you disclose before you're ready, it's almost like you're looking for someone else's approval and that could backfire.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right. I agree.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I think something that is an issue for me is the lack of libido and I know that you can use all the lubricants that you want, but I am not interested at all. But yet I really see sex as an important part of a relationship. I can't even imagine a point where it's going to be interesting to me at all.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** Are you in a relationship?

**FEMALE SPEAKER #1:** No. But I worry about it because I know it's going to be an issue. It came up as an issue in my last relationship.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** You went through chemotherapy?

**FEMALE SPEAKER #1:** Yes, chemotherapy.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** I also went through chemo and I can relate to that. I'm not in a relationship now but there's a certain numbness that I've also been experiencing and I was a little bit concerned about that. I had heard that it's a product of the chemo. There's also been, I'm sure, you know, everybody is heading on, whether they've been through one surgery or a few surgeries there's a trauma involved so there's sort of like a distancing, is that what you're sort of experiencing?

**FEMALE SPEAKER #1:** I think it's probably related to more getting closer to menopause which, you know, shouldn't happen at my age. I think it's – it is related to the – just the hormonal shift.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** How far are you after?

**FEMALE SPEAKER #1:** Three years.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** Wow. Congrats.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I hear frequently from women about the libido and there are a couple of suggestions I have. One is I would certainly speak with your oncologist/gynecologist about that issue, just to check things out and see if they have any sense of what's going on. Figure out the medical piece first. The second thought that I had on that is when we talk about sexuality and libido and sex, I think it goes back to what we were saying before, even about the dance of the seven veils. It doesn't have to go immediately to an intercourse situation and that part of what you may look for is you want to find a partner who can take it slowly and who can spend more time focused on exploring your body without any sort of vaginal penetration. I think that if you relieve yourself of that stress, and slowly rediscover and explore yourself, your body will re-learn. I would really encourage you to speak to your oncologist to address that.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I guess my concern as far as you got this laundry list of issues that you have to bring out, that my unique anatomy and I can't have children and I have no sex drive and I have no interest, it's just a laundry list and to try to find a really understanding husband.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** You're looking for companionship right now. That's something that does feel desirable to you.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Yes.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I want everything that a relationship entails and, like I said, I do think that sex is a healthy part of a relationship.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I agree, and I certainly understand that concern.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** The other suggestion that I have, again, is to go to the Planet Cancer and to the RealTime Cancer because I do know, for example, in the section, Dating and Disclosure or Dating and Relationships, is they have these issues come up and you don't even have to join the forum. You don't have to respond. You can just read through some of the topics. I know for a fact that that's come up so I certainly encourage you to see what other people have done out there in terms of this topic. Even if it doesn't address it specifically, I encourage you to post the question. I know that Planet Cancer is a wonderful community and they are very responsive and I certainly encourage you to go there maybe for further insight.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I was reading something recently and in the book, the author remarked on how on self improvement, self development, self esteem and "throw out" those things that give you poor self esteem, something like that. I noticed that by wearing only the finest attire that I own, it has a large impact on my well being, on my overall state of mind. I think it would also have an effect on a woman's sexuality. It affects you, walking around in beautiful colors. Colors affect me, the material affects me, everything affects me and it just alters my mood. It altered my mood and it altered my state of mind. I thought, wow, you know, I am beautiful, look at me now.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** On the heels of that I certainly encourage women trying different things like that. But I'm also concerned that if it is actually a medical issue, that it also gets pursued as well. But yes, I agree with that.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** The other night I was looking at a lovely silk top that I bought at Victoria's Secret a couple of years back with matching bottoms, pants, summer wear for the evening for bed, and I thought, why aren't I wearing that? I'm 41 – why am I not wearing that? It's like you forget things that used to be. You forget who you used to be when you go through this ordeal you can forget who you once were.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** One of the things that's clear to me is that there's not a one-size fits all for all survivors. It's important to pick and choose from some of the things that I said and some of the things that are being said tonight and try to do something you haven't tried to do before. You can't rule it out as it not working until you actually tried it. And people have suggested that in terms of wearing things that will make you feel good but they haven't necessarily

addressed that about sexuality and libido. I don't know what the research is on that or even anecdotally so I appreciate you sharing that.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** It has lifted because I have now near my apartment door I have four bagfuls of clothing that I want to sell, you know, just the old, you know, low self esteem clothing. They don't do anything for me, clothing, four bags that I'm looking to sell at a local second-hand store and I'm just cleaning out my life and what's left are things that really reflect who I am and what I'm really about and in terms of the sexuality matter, the libido, the – even on the weekend I don't observe the Sabbath. I – and I thought the other day, I thought, why don't you put this on? You're so used to walking around on the weekends when you're not going out, in jogging pants and a T-shirt – nothing – so now I make it a point every day of the week to dress up as though I were going out. You know, to beautify myself, to do my make-up on a regular occasion. I mean no matter what I always make sure that I look my finest.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I went to one Look Good Feel Better and one woman replied how she has no time to think of her appearance. She said she barely has enough energy for the other parts of the day for herself and I was thinking in the back of my mind quite the opposite. It's so important to think of your appearance. It's so important to think of how you present yourself to yourself, not just to others but as a woman to who you are. I think it's very important.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** We are having another Teleconference scheduled for August and that's going to be on addressing the issue of going into the High Holidays.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** One of the things that I also wanted to generate from tonight's Teleconference is, what are your needs? Because I want to make sure that Sharsheret is programming properly in terms of meeting your needs.

**FEMALE SPEAKER #1:** OK. I just wanted to go back to addressing -the libido issue. You had mentioned that you felt that it was a block, not an emotional block. Have you thought that through? Because sometimes through the surgeries and maybe feeling a little disfigured sexuality is decreased versus keeping the same type of libido after surgeries. Have you thought about that at all?

**FEMALE SPEAKER #2:** Yes, I am fairly sure that it's not an emotional block that I hate my body. It's just that my body's not reacting, there's no reason to continue.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I do know that there have been other conferences out there

on this particular issue. I'm going to do that research and see if I can invite one of those speakers to participate in another intimate teleconference on that particular topic.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I wonder, you know, what are reasonable expectations in a relationship? And if you're not meeting those expectations are there any Jewish laws around that? You know, man is supposed to be able to please his wife and what if you're not really pleasurable and it's not your fault, it's not his fault? Anyway, just from a Jewish perspective.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Right, right.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** These issues can come up. I mean I'm assuming that we as women that are on the call are single – that's the point of this forum, but I have heard of people who have been through breast cancer or different types of cancer and it presents its own challenges within a marriage so those would be common issues that we as a single would experience also.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** I want to conclude by saying that we are scheduled for some time in August. Ellen, do we know when that is?

**ELLEN KLEINHAUS:** Yes. It's Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>.

**SHERA DUBITSKY:** Ellen and I will certainly discuss some possible resources and to really think about perhaps adding another teleconference and addressing those issues. It would really be helpful to us if you can complete the evaluations and get them back to us because we want to tailor the programs that are really going to best meet your needs. If you could just put down some of the topics that would be interesting to you and particularly, your thoughts about doing a Teleconference on sexuality and breast cancer, to certainly include that as well. We will do our best to provide programming that meets your unique needs.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Thank you.