HEALING THROUGH HULA FOR BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS

University of Hawai'i Cancer Center researchers want to know if hula can help breast cancer survivors

HONOLULU – A new study is in progress to determine if hula can be an effective and culturally appropriate way to help breast cancer survivors recover after active cancer treatment.

University of Hawai'i Cancer Center researchers want to see if this activity can help prevent breast cancer from returning and improve the overall quality of life for survivors.

"In a multicultural community like Hawaii hula is a familiar form of cultural expression through dance. We believe hula can benefit cancer survivors on multiple levels," said Lenora Loo, PhD, an assistant professor in the Cancer Center’s Epidemiology Program. She is conducting the study with Erin Bantum, PhD, an assistant professor in the Cancer Prevention and Control Program. "Some participants are recovering from invasive breast cancer such as stage-3 breast cancer," Loo said.

Hula requires aerobic activity, whole-body movement engaging arms, concentration and memorization. Before and after the six-month study period, participants give blood samples and have their weight and height recorded. These measurements will help calculate the participant's biological changes from increased hula exercise. Each person also fills out a questionnaire to record any changes in emotional state and lifestyle.
The researchers took about one year to recruit for the trial. More than 100 people applied, but only a dozen fit the criteria for the clinical trial. The participants are required to be breast cancer survivors who have been treated within the past five years. They also cannot exercise more than one hour a week outside of the hula class.

TeMoana Makolo, niece to the legendary late Kumu Hula Leilani Alama, is teaching the hula class. Makolo is a breast cancer survivor herself and relates to the physical and emotional challenges the participants go through during and after treatment. "I was prepared for the women to be incapable healthwise, but all of them are able to stand and do their hula," said Makolo. "The joy I'm getting out of this is they are enjoying it and I can see that. They are more gung-ho than some of my regular students. I think they are just totally loving it."

Read an article about the hula study by Nina Wu with the Star Advertiser.