

Good MEDICINE

ELIZABETH JEKOT HAS BATTLED BREAST CANCER AS BOTH DOCTOR AND PATIENT. NOW, HER SELF-CARE RECOVERY REGIMEN HELPS HER HELP OTHERS.

By JACQUELYN B. FLETCHER

Elizabeth Jekot, MD, learned the value of a well-balanced life from one tough teacher: breast cancer. Diagnosed five years ago, the diagnostic radiologist quickly rediscovered her priorities: “God, family and work — in that order,” as Jekot puts it.

Establishing balanced, value-driven priorities was critical for Jekot to restore her well-being. And now that she’s a survivor, that’s a message she’s eager to share with others. But it’s not just good advice she’s sharing.

In 2005, Jekot founded the Elizabeth Jekot Breast Imaging Center in Richardson, Texas (www.jekotbreastimagingcenter.com). The center is dedicated to providing state-of-the-art breast imaging to help women identify and beat the disease.

Jekot’s commitment to her work is deep. But so is her commitment to health and a good work-life balance. Today she invests the same level of care in her personal pursuits as she did during her recovery. She prioritizes the activities she loves, including meditation and community service, and makes time to connect with family. For Jekot, this combination of self-care, meaningful relationships and purpose-centered work is proving to be good medicine.

DRIVE AND DESIRE

Even as a child, Jekot was disciplined and dedicated.

From age 7 through her first year in college, she swam competitively. Supported and encouraged by her family, her athletic talents bloomed, and her professional ambitions began to take form. As she worked toward



her goals in the pool, she pursued her dream of following in her father’s footsteps and becoming a doctor.

Jekot moved from her hometown of Chicago to Fort Worth, Texas, to attend Texas Christian University, where she met her future husband, David Miller, DDS. After graduation, she enrolled in the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and then went on to complete an internship and residency in diagnostic radiology at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas.

Jekot’s life changed during her residency. Her older sister had cancer. “Mary was first diagnosed with breast cancer at 32 and then again at 37,” Jekot recalls. As she watched her sister go through a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation, Jekot’s desire to join the fight against breast cancer blossomed into a career ambition.

In July 1993, she pursued a breast imaging fellowship at the Komen Breast Center at Baylor University Medical Center (now called the Baylor Sammons Breast Imaging Center). Two years later, she was named medical director of the Center for Women’s Health at Richardson Regional Medical Center, where she practiced for more than 11 years. But Jekot wanted to use the latest technologies, such as digital mammography and dedicated breast MRI, and the Center didn’t have those tools yet. In order to provide the most state-of-the-art care to her patients, she would eventually open her own center.

In 2000, while still at Richardson Regional, Jekot, then 37, found a lump in her breast after a routine self-exam. That October she was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. She opted for a double mastectomy and four rounds of chemotherapy, to be followed by breast reconstruction surgery. During that period, Jekot also turned an inquiring eye toward her own life. →



Above (clockwise from right): Elizabeth and daughter Katie at the 2004 North Texas Race for the Cure (Elizabeth won Overall Survivor); Elizabeth and husband David; Elizabeth reviewing an MRI at Elizabeth Jekot Breast Imaging Center; post-chemo face painting by Katie (who thought they should both be Dalmations for the day). At left: Race for the Cure, June 2005 (Elizabeth again won Overall Survivor).

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

Before her diagnosis, Jekot focused on helping other women heal from breast cancer. She hadn't intentionally neglected activities and priorities outside of work, but she hadn't mindfully cultivated much work-life balance, either. Once faced with her own cancer, though, she took stock of the resources in her life that could help her heal, and she reset her priorities.

Jekot relied on her faith, her family and her sense of humor to keep her spirits up during treatment. She also depended on a morning meditation ritual — one her husband had introduced to her just four months before her diagnosis. "I meditated with the prayer of St. Francis, and it really helped me," Jekot says. The meditation practice, along with yoga, helped strengthen her body for chemotherapy.

She drew the most strength, however, from family. Her daughter, Katie, was 3 at the time, and her mindset inspired Jekot tremendously. "Small children have a special, pure quality of soul," she explains, "and that was uplifting for David and me." She also relied on date-nights with her husband for life-affirming infusions of intimacy and laughter.

KEEPING THE GOOD

During her treatment and recovery, Jekot began cultivating healthy habits. For example, she and her husband made a major dietary shift: They began excluding refined sugar. "There's some research that indicates elevated insulin levels contribute to cancer," Jekot notes. "I never experienced much trouble with sugar highs and lows, or with my weight, but since I took refined sugar out of my diet, I've found I have greater stamina and focus."

To this day, Jekot also avoids bread and pasta, and she steers clear of any foods made with white flour and other refined carbohydrates. She drinks green tea and eats lots of fruits, vegetables and nuts. "Overall, my health and well-being have really improved," Jekot reports.

Along with her wholesome diet and meditation practice, Jekot credits her boundless energy to regular workouts and active pastimes. She loves to dance. She climbs stairs instead of taking elevators. She is once again swimming competitively, and now she's running competitively, too.

In 2003, Jekot was named the New Balance honorary chairperson of the Susan G. Komen Dallas Race for the Cure (www.komen-dallas.org) — and she decided to run it, too. About six weeks in advance, she began building up her running routine until she was running three miles every other day. She finished the 5K race with a time of 23:25, and won the Master Survivor Award for women over 40. Since then, she has won awards in the event every year.

Not long after taking up running, she reestablished her swimming routine. In the fall of 2004, Jekot looked up the qualifying times in the 1,650-yard

"I told Katie when I came home from a trip that I was like a cell phone and her hugs are my charger."



freestyle for the U.S. Masters Swimming program. Realizing she could swim fast enough to qualify for the May 2005 masters short-course yards national championships, she began training at the Life Time Fitness club in Garland, Texas.

She swam a mile every other day, practiced her form and did interval work. Her goals were to place in the top 10 in her age group and to finish in less than 22 minutes. She achieved both, earning a 10th-place finish in the 40- to 44-year-old women's age group with a time of 21:59.98.

WALKING HER WALK

October 2005 marked Jekot's fifth year of freedom from cancer. She feels blessed to be healthy and is deeply satisfied to be directing her own state-of-the-art breast imaging center. Her passion for her work is evident, notes Terre McGlothlin, MD, a breast surgical oncologist at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Plano who performed Jekot's double mastectomy. "Her approach goes so far past scalpels and the other things we typically do for cancer, because she acknowledges there is a person attached to the cancer."

Jekot's own experience with cancer helps her empathize with the women she sees in practice. And knowing how important whole-life balance was to her recovery, she continues to carve out quality time for the personal pursuits that bring her joy.

"I believe that we physicians need to be role models for our patients in terms of exercise and health. Many people have told me that because I look so healthy and I survived cancer, they think they can get through it, too. If I'm a doctor that talks the talk, I have to walk the walk." ●

Jacquelyn B. Fletcher is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer.



A souvenir button (above, right) of Jekot and family commemorates her first race as a survivor.

SUCCESS SUMMARY

MEET: Elizabeth Jekot, MD, a 42-year-old diagnostic radiologist.

BIG ACHIEVEMENTS: Surviving breast cancer, starting a breast-imaging center, finding work-life balance.

BIG INSPIRATION: Her sister's successful battles with breast cancer.

WHAT WORKED: Mother-daughter time; date-nights with her husband, David, a stay-at-home dad for the past eight years.

WHAT DIDN'T: Skipping exercise and massage when she got busy.

WORDS OF WISDOM: "It's important to have a schedule and stick to it, but at the same time allow for flexibility. Get exercise in when you can. Plan your downtime to help you get recentered or refocused."