BRA Day aims to ‘close the loop’ on breast recon awareness worldwide

BY MIKE STOKES

The message behind Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day is simple, but it comes as a powerful revelation to vast numbers of breast cancer patients worldwide: Breast reconstruction is an option. While this fact may seem obvious to the plastic surgeons who perform these procedures, a study conducted by ASPS member Amy Alderman, MD, Atlanta, shows that roughly 70 percent of breast cancer patients in the United States are not informed of the availability of breast reconstruction after mastectomy as part of the treatment and healing process – many are never referred to (and others are discouraged from consulting) a plastic surgeon. The primary goal of BRA Day is to shrink that knowledge gap.

“It doesn’t matter where in the world you live,” says ASPS President Malcolm Z. Roth, MD. “If you ask women who have had a mastectomy how they feel after they get breast reconstruction, they invariably say the same thing: ‘I feel whole again.’ What an important message it is that women should find a plastic surgeon and learn what their options are. If they choose not to be reconstructed, that’s their choice – but give them the information.”

BRA Day is the brainchild of ASPS member Mitch Brown, MD, Toronto, who organized the inaugural event last year across Canada by forming a multidisciplinary committee of plastic surgeons, plastic surgical nurses and women from breast cancer support groups.

“The idea came over the course of many years through seeing patients on a regular basis who, at some point in time, felt confused or conflicted about the lack of information that was available to them about breast reconstruction,” Dr. Brown says. “Through the generous gift of time from a variety of plastic surgeons who took regional leadership and then promoted activities in each of the smaller communities, BRA Day took off.”

Dr. Brown says that when he contacted ASPS to join the effort for 2012, the response was immediate.

“ASPS loved it,” he says. “We wanted to get things underway and get our feet wet in Canada first, and then the Society jumped on it in a big way for 2012.”

“As soon as I heard about it, I knew this is something we needed to do,” says Dr. Roth.

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A new way of reading PSN is now at your fingertips. Following in the footsteps of the immensely popular PRS iPad app, Plastic Surgery News is now available for the tablet device. Visit Apple's App Store to download the free PSN app (search "Plastic Surgery News") or text-drive the PSN – and PRS apps – in the ASPS Resource Center during Plastic Surgery The Meeting in New Orleans.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

ASPS doc builds hospitals owned, run by physicians

David Genevoc, MD, responded to dismissive attitudes by officials in “corporate medicine” in Dallas by striking out on his own and becoming one of the driving forces behind the Forest Park Medical Center. Two hospital campuses are up and running, two others are under construction – and the search for additional sites continues. All this to give physicians control of their patients, facilities and ancillary medical personnel – as well as their destiny, he says. Page 20

PRS partners with Brazil journal to expand content

PRS and Revista, the Brazilian society’s scientific journal, have joined forces to offer expanded content in an educational give-and-take, constructed to serve readers in both nations. While providing content for each other’s journals, this new model of scholarly publishing also marks the start of a new approach in efforts by PRS to promote the scientific development of plastic surgery worldwide. Page 8

ALSO INSIDE...

Behind the scenes with Jewel

Treating the chronic pain patient

UTMB chief’s keys to leadership

Summer job – or epic test?

Health care in election spotlight

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Additional PSN content is available online at PSNextra.org.
Go behind the scenes of Jewel’s BRA Day PSAs

BY MIKE STOKES

A ward-winning singer-songwriter Jewel brought her guitar to a rented ski chalet near her vacation home in Telluride, Colo., to shoot a series of four public service announcements (PSAs) for the ASPS/BRA Breast Reconstruction Awareness Campaign on July 23. A nine-person crew spent the previous night converting the home into a makeshift television studio. Shortly after Jewel arrived at 11:15 a.m. with her manager and makeup artist, production began. Each of the four spots was filmed from different perspectives – wide, medium and tight shots – to allow the video editor to cut back and forth between different points of view. The singer chatted with the crew between shots and even performed her song “Flower” for use in lengths.

“Jewel was helpful, cooperative, sincere and personable,” says ASPS Public Relations Director Phil Hayes, who supervised the shoot. “And she did a great job of interpreting the copy.” Filming wrapped at 5 p.m., and the first of the PSAs was released Sept. 7.

“I hope that women will become part of this campaign by empowering themselves with information on this topic and gaining a better understanding of a survivor’s options for reconstructive surgery,” says Jewel. “Any time you take the initiative to learn more and fully understand a disease, you absolutely become empowered. That is what BRA Day is all about – empowerment through education. To view the PSA, visit plasticsurgery.org or the ASPS channel on YouTube.

The making of the video: (top) Jewel performs her song “Flower” on camera; (bottom) filming Breast Cancer Awareness public service announcements in front of a greenscreen.

Widespread support
Since its inception 18 months ago, support for BRA Day has spread fast, far and wide. More than 20 nations will recognize BRA Day on Oct. 17 with both plastic surgeons and patients serving as ambassadors and advocates. In the United States, at PSN press time approximately 100 local BRA Day USA events (see sidebar on next page) had been planned across the country.

Dr. Brown admits, however, that his effort to launch BRA Day was initially met with skepticism from some leaders of patient advocacy organizations who didn’t recognize the reconstructive nature of the specialty and questioned the motives behind the campaign.

“The first thing they said is, ‘Are you trying to drive business?’” Dr. Brown recalls. “In Canada, we have a year to 18-month waiting list for surgery – we don’t want or need any more business. BRA Day is not about trying to do more breast augmentations or reductions. I worried whether this is really for what people will think we’re trying to do, and there was a need for education to de-program the way people thought about plastic surgery. This was not at all about self-promotion, but that perception was one barrier that we will have to be very cautious about and consistently overcome.”

While BRA Day was launched to empower and inform breast cancer patients, the campaign is also providing an opportunity to publicly showcase the breadth of the specialty.

“From a public relations perspective, helping to promote what is plastic surgery, what is reconstructive surgery – there’s no doubt that there is some component of this that is good for the image of the profession,” says Dr. Brown.

“This is a way for plastic surgeons to do something that is seen across the board as supporting and supportive of women,” adds Dr. Reath. “Plastic surgeons are always going to have the edge when it comes to breast reconstruction because we do so much of it, and there are so many other things that we do.”

BRA Day events
The message behind BRA Day has been amplified nationwide through the involve-ment of singer-songwriter Jewel, who part-nered with ASPS as June in spouse asks for BRA Day USA and the ASPS/PSF Breast Reconstruction Awareness Campaign. The singer is donating proceeds to the PSF from sales of her new song “Flower,” which she was inspired by breast cancer survivors. “Flower” is such a personal song to me, and it fits this campaign in such a special way,” Jewel says. “The song is about overcoming obstacles with grace, dignity and courage – and out of that transformation and struggle is pure beauty.”

Jewel has also filmed public service announcements to raise awareness for breast reconstruction (see sidebar) and will also perform a benefit concert during Plastic Surgery The Movie on Oct. 29 in New Orleans with proceeds going to The PSF and local breast cancer charity Breastation.

“ASPS really saw the value in BRA Day and has taken it to a level that I could never have anticipated,” says Dr. Brown.

National media ranging from The Washington Post to E! television have report-ed on the campaign, and coverage is expected to intensify with the start of Breast Cancer Awareness month.

“We’re obviously thrilled with the media coverage,” says Dr. Reath, who is making a gift of Jewel’s song to his patients during October (see PSNExtra.org to learn how to do the same). “And one of the reasons we’ve had such good coverage is that BRA Day has a message worthy of the attention.

“For a long time, this has been an uphill climb,” he adds. “The fact that seven of 10 women who are facing breast cancer do not understand their breast reconstruction options is something we can really do something about.”

On an individual level, numerous plastic surgeons have organized BRA Day events in their communities to support breast cancer education and promote breast reconstruction awareness. Events range from open houses and informational sessions to wine tastings and art exhibits.

ASPS members Jeffery Ucker, MD, and Jonathan Weiser, MD, have even enlisted breast reconstruction patient and “E! News”

**"It’s wonderful that we as plastic surgeons can participate in something like this, and it’s great that ASPS can get behind this campaign. We’ll be a better Society for it.”**

**Closing the gap**

Dr. Alderman’s research showed the lack of information is even more pronounced among minorities and women from remote areas who lack access to a qualified plastic surgeon.

“I would see women come from small towns who had a mastectomy four or five years earlier and had been struggling to live with the use of a prosthesis,” Dr. Brown says. “I would ask them ‘Why now? What’s bringing you to come and see me now?’ And they’d say, ‘I just found out this was available. I never knew that breast reconstruction was an option – I never knew that it existed.’

“Being a variety of patients like that, it became quite clear that there was a lack of access, awareness and education for reconstruction, and it seemed sensible to me to put on some sort of national event that could promote it,” Dr. Brown says.

While health care systems around the globe vary, this lack of awareness seems universal. In the United States, an added layer of education is often required to make both breast cancer patients and referring physicians aware that insurance companies are required to provide coverage for breast reconstruction after mastectomy for viable candidates.

“Reconstruction is a way to really help the healing process,” says ASPS Public Education Chair David Reath, MD, Knoxville, Tenn. “The wounds come in many dimensions – they are physical, psychological, spiritual – and while breast reconstruction is not the solution for everybody, it is part of the solution for a lot of people.”

Dr. Roth notes, however, that the message behind BRA Day USA and the ASPS/PSF Breast Reconstruction Awareness Campaign is not reserved solely for patients; the effort is also intended to inform other physicians involved in treating breast cancer patients that plastic care for these patients will cover the procedure and all patients must be given the opportunity to talk to a plastic surgeon about their options.

“It’s a half hour to a hour or longer – and often requires more than one visit before a patient is able to determine what type of reconstruction she is going to choose,” says Dr. Roth. “And it’s a discussion that the breast surgeon really doesn’t have the training, expertise or even time to have with a patient. That’s a big part of the reason why aren’t informed.”

“I see a great number of patients who come in and say, ‘I wish I’d known about cer-tain reconstruction options beforehand. I wish I could turn back the clock,’” says ASPS member Frank DellaCroce, MD, co-founder of the Center for Restorative Breast Surgery in New Orleans – one of several organiza-tions that has provided support for BRA Day. “The problem is, you can’t turn back the clock.”

And that’s precisely why Dr. Roth stresses that every breast cancer patient needs to be made aware of her reconstruction options and be allowed to make an informed choice. Women who’ve had mastectomies and those later are referred – often by a rel-ative or friend who’s had breast reconstruc-tion – will often say, ‘My surgeon never told me that breast reconstruction was an option for me, they said I was too old or it was something that I shouldn’t do at this point in time,’” Dr. Roth adds.

“Saying to someone who has been diag-nosed with cancer that she doesn’t need reconstruction is a horrible message,” he says. “It’s not up to the surgeon – it’s up to the woman. It should be her choice. A better message would be, ‘If reconstruction is something you want to consider, why don’t you talk to a plastic surgeon before we do your mastectomy?’”

**BR A Day founder Mitch Brown, MD, Toronto, has given the distinctive pink ribbon of Breast Cancer Awareness Month a twist. His BRA Day ribbon features an additional loop at the bottom to signify how plastic surgeons literally and figuratively close the loop on breast reconstruction.**

“I tried to put a reconstructive slant on it,” Dr. Brown says of the design. “It took a while, but it seemed natural that if you took the inner loop and closed it, you created two things. First is the concept of the ‘closing loop’, which is really what we as plastic surgeons have said for many years that we’re able to do for patients who have undergone a mastectomy for breast cancer.”

“And if you take the closed loop and turn it on its side, it’s also an infinity sign, which is a great symbol for hope, future and longevity,” he adds.

BRA Day ribbons are available online at www.asps.org ($50 for packages of 25 ribbons, sales will be donated to the Breast Cancer Awareness Fund of The PSF, which supports charity care in communities nationwide, breast reconstruction research and public awareness through education campaigns.)
co-anchor Giuliana Rancic to speak at the Memorial Regional Hospital Cancer Center in Hollywood, Fla., on Oct. 25. Drs. Uecker and Weiser are physicians at the Physicians Institute of Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery, will make a donation to The PSF from proceeds of the event, which features a panel discussion with physicians members of a breast cancer treatment team as well as a cocktail reception and auction of luxury items valued at $80,000— including a trip to France—hosted by Chanel Boutique of Bal Harbour, Fla.

“We heard about BRA Day from our plastic surgical nurse, and we thought it was a great idea,” says Dr. Weiser. “We do a lot of breast reconstruction, and this seemed like a great way to bring everything together. October is always about breast cancer so why not talk, as we should, about breast reconstruction— particularly when statistics show that most women eligible for breast reconstruction are not being informed of their options.”

Dr. Weiser expects the involvement of Rancic will draw those who may have never thought about breast cancer or reconstruction.

“We thought about what would make people stand up and notice,” he says. “It’s nice to have a panel of doctors and a discussion, but ultimately, we’re trying to reach people who may, in the future, be considering breast reconstruction. Those people won’t necessarily come to an event where people are talking about a condition they don’t have. Giuliana Rancic has been great with her openness regarding her own mastectomies and reconstruction—and she’s more than willing to share her experiences.”

A number of organizations have also generously provided financial support for the BRA Day USA effort, including Sientra, LifeCell, the Center for Restorative Breast, Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation (MTF), New York Breast Reconstruction Alliance (nyBRA) and Texas Center for Breast Reconstruction.

“Sientra is privileged to be a major national contributor to BRA Day USA, says Sientra founder and CEO Han Zi. “We applied to be a panelist in a song-writer-jewel for their joint commitment— and we are proud to play an exclusive role in supporting their efforts. This collaboration is a natural for Sientra as it is consistent with our corporate values— passion and caring, about patients and their well-being.”

“BRA Day USA represents the most significant recipient-related cause that MTF has chosen to support in its 25-year history,” says Heather Brennan, MTF’s group product director, general & plastics. “This speaks volumes to the value we see in BRA Day’s mission to educate women of their post-mastectomy reconstruction options. Through our work with plastic surgeons, we’ve learned that breast reconstruction not only represents a physical restoration, but a mental and spiritual one as well, and we’re so excited to be a part of that transformation for so many women.”

“It has long been our mission to educate and support women through the total healing process following mastectomy, which is why MTF was The Presbyterian,” says Dr. Feingold, co-founder of nyBRA, an initiative by Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, P.C., in Long Island, N.Y., dedicated to improving both quality of life and outcomes for women undergoing breast reconstruction.

The future of BRA Day

Several states have enacted laws to require that women receive information about their breast cancer treatment and reconstructive options, and the Breast Cancer Patient Education Act has been introduced to Congress as ways to inform and empower women. Dr. Brown says the continued success of BRA Day will rest with patients carrying the message forward—and he is gratified to see the active role that so many are taking in it.

“It’s really a grass-roots kind of thing, and the potential is unlimited,” says Dr. Brown.

“In another 18 months, I hope to see us recognized on calendars and popping up in Outlook calendars. Just as people recognize October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I hope they will just as easily recognize the third Wednesday of every October as Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day.”

Dr. Brown says patients have been active in BRA Day since its inception by creating print campaigns and organizing local ‘show-and-tell’ rooms, powerful events that allow women diagnosed with breast cancer to meet with breast reconstruction patients and view their results first-hand.

A show-and-tell event has been organized as part of this year’s BRA Day functions at the Center for Restorative Breast in New Orleans. Kim Sport, a 2012 Patient of Courage honoree who survived two battles with breast cancer and had a mastectomy with immediate breast reconstruction, is organizing it.

“I feel it is very important to share my experience with other women in my shoes. I don’t want them to just have to look at a photo,” says Sport. “I want to show them what reconstruction really looks like.”

The national kick-off event will begin with a 10 a.m. press conference followed by a flash mob. After the show-and-tell event, the New Orleans Superdome will be lit with pink lighting.

Breast reconstruction patient and 2011 Patients of Courage honoree Dee Dee Ricks has organized a fashion show in New York to raise awareness among colleagues in the financial industry by organizing a BRA Day fashion show on Oct. 17, which will feature popular Brooklyn DJ Vikas Sapra and top models wearing Intimacy Lingerie.

“We are creating a sexy, hot event around an issue that most people don’t understand or often don’t want to discuss—breast reconstruction,” says Ricks, who adds that the goal of the event is to raise awareness that breast reconstruction is more than an option—it’s a patient’s right.

Whether driven by patients, plastic surgeons, government or industry, however, at its heart, BRA Day touches on an issue that has no boundaries.

“When one in eight women in the United States is diagnosed with breast cancer,” says Dr. Roth, “virtually everyone in our country is touched by it.”

And providing the information that breast reconstruction options are available may offer added comfort, hope and strength for women in need.

Please visit BRAdayUSA.org, BRA-Day.com, Facebook/Breast ReconAwareness and Twitter (@BRAdayUSA) for more information about BRA Day events, the jewel concert, and more.

ASPS members recognizing BRA Day USA

BRA Day USA recognizes BRA Day USA events and activities planned by plastic surgeons, plastic surgical nurses and patients. The following is a listing (at PSF press time) of ASPS members, practices and medical centers hosting BRA Day festivities. Visit BRAdayUSA.com for updates.

Arkansas
Fayetteville: NWA Center for Plastic Surgery
Little Rock: Little Rock Plastic Surgery

California
Beverly Hills: Lisa Casaleh, MD
Los Angeles: Mosli Salbian, MD; Michael Obeng, MD – Forever Femme (Oct. 19)
Condon: Lynn Jeffers, MD
San Francisco: Karen Horton, MD

Colorado
Lone Tree: Park Meadows Cosmetic Surgery

Florida
Jacksonville: Desai Center for Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery
Miami: Miami Plastic Surgery


Illinois
Chicago: Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University presents The 2012 Chicago Breast Symposium (Oct. 15-16)
Springfield: SIU School of Medicine, Department of Surgery

Louisiana
New Orleans: Center for Restorative Breast Surgery presents the 2012 BRA Day National Launch Event

Massachusetts
Springfield: Pioneer Valley Plastic Surgery

Michigan
Birmingham: Dr. Ellen Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

Minnesota
St. Cloud: Midlands Plastic Surgeons

Missouri
Creve Coeur

West County Plastic Surgeons

New York
Bardonia, Long Island Plastic Surgical Group presents a Patient Appreciation Lunch & Open House Art Exhibit
New York: Get Intimate Fashion Show; Pink Chose Me

North Carolina
Holly: Catawba Valley Medical Center; Hickory Plastic Surgery; Piedmont Plastic Surgery & Dermatology
Wilson: Wilson Plastic Surgery

West Virginia
Charleston: Stewart & Thaxton, PLLC
Morgantown: West Virginia University Healthcare Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

Wisconsin
Waukesha: Bellissima Plastic Surgery & Medspa

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