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## Picture Book Helps Children Understand Mothers' Cancer

BY DEANNA SHEFFIELD

She became a breast surgeon because she fell in love with assisting women and wanted to make a difference. But now Shenin Sachedina, DO, is making a different kind of impact — this time in the lives of children affected by breast cancer.

With the young children of the women she treats in mind, Sachedina wrote a book to help children understand breast cancer and its treatments. The book covers topics ranging from surgery and chemotherapy to radiation, all in terms that children over the age of five can easily understand.

Her book, *Metu and Lee Learn About Breast Cancer*, was written to empower children through an informational story featuring friendly characters such as Chemo Commando, Radiation Rod, Good Cells and Bad Cells.

The 32-page hardcover book was released in May and sold more than 500 copies in the first 10 weeks. An audio version of the book is expected later this year.

Sachedina, an oncologist for nearly 11 years, said the book is now a tool she uses in her own Orlando area practice. And she's not the only one. A number of area teachers are now using the book as enrichment for their students.

"I was seeing more women with families, and when I counseled the women I would also counsel the families," Sachedina said. "But it was really hard for the children. So one year ago I sat down and wrote the text. I expected it would help a lot of people."

She noted that one woman suffering from breast cancer purchased the book to read to her 8-year-old granddaughter who did not understand why her grandmother couldn't be there for her all the time or do the things she used to do. Now that she understands what breast cancer is, the young girl will come over and help with dishes and other chores, Sachedina said.

"It talks about breast cancer in medical terms but in terms that children can understand. It's two siblings asking questions and it's a real, honest and illustrated forum," she said. "It's not a typical children's book. It just came together really well."

Sachedina said it is especially important to have such a tool to teach children about cancer because the disease is increasingly striking more women of childbearing age, many of whom already have children.

In addition, according to a January article in the *British Journal of Cancer*, youth may suffer from clinical depression and other emotional problems when a mother is diagnosed with breast cancer. But those impacts can be minimized with accurate information for affected children.

"Over the last 10 years as a breast surgeon, I have come to the conclusion that breast cancer is a physiologic disease of the woman involved, and a disease of the family and society at large," Sachedina said. "With the statistics as compelling as one in eight women who will face this disease in their lifetime, the resources for families facing this disease need to be expanded."

While the book is aimed at a young audience, it's not limited to that group. Adults have been purchasing the book for themselves or others, Sachedina noted.



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"A lot of older women are buying the book to understand what is happening to them," Sachedina said. "It's been amazing."

Sachedina, who spent most of her residencies doing general and trauma surgery, said discovering her love of helping women with breast disease was a "fluke."

"When I finished, I realized that I would see a lot of breast disease so I did a rotation at M.D. Anderson in Houston and just fell in love with it," she explained. "It's been the most amazing thing; I just love it."

Sachedina doesn't plan to stop at this book either. Others already are in the works.

"Breast cancer was the driving engine but next is diabetes, then leukemia," Sachedina said. "In my opinion, if you educate children, they do better."

"Their understandings of changes around them are well tolerated, provided they are given information to assist them. To their credit, they are able to handle more than my generation at that age."

The book is available for purchase at select Borders in the Central Florida region, [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) and at [www.MetuandLee.com](http://www.MetuandLee.com).

A portion of the proceeds will be donated to The Metu and Lee Fund through the Community Foundation of Central Florida. The fund assists middle class families who are facing the challenges of dealing with a child who has cancer. It assists families in a number of ways, including help with funeral expenses for the terminally ill patient.

In addition, Trans Contential Records and Lou Pearlman have donated a song to the educational effort. The song, Metu and Lee Told Me, is written by Jack Kapanka with vocals by Sarah and Hannah Peasall, of the Peasall Sisters, who won a Grammy for "Brother Where Art Thou," with George Clooney. The song is set to be released in the next few weeks.

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