

Advocates everywhere at SABCS

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I am always sad to leave SABCS because it's been a time to reconnect with the amazing men and women who work full time, mostly as volunteers, advocating for breast cancer and the women and men who are diagnosed with the disease.

Advocacy is one of those words that can be scary if you don't know what it means because it sounds like something that requires a PhD, but advocates come with all levels of education. What they have that others don't is amazing passion to help after having been through it themselves, or to honor someone they love.

Passion is an amazing thing to watch. It's what prompted Nancy Brinker to create Susan G. Komen for the Cure to honor her sister, Susan Komen, who died of breast cancer. Now Komen is the largest funder of breast cancer research outside the government. It's what prompted the creation of Breast Cancer Action, the Young Survival Coalition, and literally hundreds of other groups locally and nationally.

Every advocate and advocacy organization has its own focus, and, believe me, with breast cancer, there will never be enough advocates to cover every aspect of this disease. For example, this week I have highlighted seven of the 186 advocates in San Antonio this year, each of whom works to bring attention to a different area of breast cancer whether it be policy change, male breast cancer, inflammatory breast cancer, young women with breast cancer, African American women with breast cancer, women with metastatic breast cancer, and many more. Indeed, many of the advocates work in multiple areas because once they tackle one issue, they find that there are 10 more underlying issues that need attention.

There are also those who advocate with whimsy, the approach of Rene Bowditch and Mary Beth Gibson who are co-founders of [Beyond Boobs!](#). The women met at a retreat for survivors in 2006 where Rene was dressed as her alter ego, the Good Health Fairy, the persona she has brought to SABCS and one that gets a lot of attention. The two formed a support group that became a nonprofit whose mission is to educate all women about breast health while offering support for young women who are diagnosed.



Being in the passion of the advocates here is what keeps me coming back year after year to this event, because as tired as I am by the end of the day, when I go to the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation Hot Topics session every evening, I am renewed by the room full of women and men who have come to learn more so they can go home and advocate for others. Last night I met a young man named Peter, one of 52 men (so far) with breast cancer who lived at Camp Lejeune North Carolina between 1957 and 1985. Peter stands out in this mostly female group and the women have clearly come to adore him. Peter is battling metastatic breast cancer and has been a national advocate for the other men and women stationed at the Marine Corps Base at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, who were exposed to contaminated drinking water from 1957 until 1987.

Peter sits with the other advocates as they listen to a panel of doctors who clarify, and simplify, the day's lectures to hit on the high points (this is also a favorite spot for those who are not medically trained to come and get some effective translation of medical to real life).

On Sunday the advocates will head to their homes to take what they have learned to their own communities -- and to be there for the next wave of advocates who will hear the words *you have breast cancer* this year.