

Breaking THE HABIT

KARMANOS HELPS LUNG CANCER PATIENT QUIT SMOKING – FOR GOOD

Bonnie Evans admits she grew up in a strict household. But there's one thing her parents allowed their children to do, starting in their late teens.

"They gave us permission to smoke," says Evans, 55. "I started smoking at age 17."

By the time Evans became an adult, she went from smoking a few occasional cigarettes to two packs a day. Smoking helped her cope with stress, she said.

Life became more stressful for Evans in 2003 when doctors diagnosed her with stage IV lung cancer. After three months of chemotherapy and radiation therapy, the tumors were gone. Still, Evans continued to smoke. Six months later, the cancer returned.

"I felt completely ashamed, and my doctor made me feel even more ashamed," Evans says. "I wanted to quit and tried many times, but nothing worked."

Evans switched doctors and came to Karmanos, where she began treatment under the care of Shirish Gadgeel, M.D., leader, Thoracic Oncology Multidisciplinary Team, and associate professor, Wayne State University School of Medicine. She also made an appointment with Oncology Social Worker Kathleen Hardy.

"At Karmanos, we provide the tools to help them quit," Hardy says. "And the desire to quit has to come from the patient – we don't force anyone into it."

Hardy told Evans about the smoking cessation workshops at Karmanos, organized by the department of Patient and Community Education.

"The process of quitting is different for every patient – that's why we help patients create a personalized smoking cessation plan," Hardy says. "Very few people are able to quit cold turkey. Relapse is often part of recovery for any addiction."

Evans made greater progress once she began attending the workshops, available at no charge to Karmanos patients and the community.

Finally, after trying for five years, Evans quit smoking for good in January 2010.

"It took a whole team of people to help me quit," says Evans. "At Karmanos, there is no condescending attitude. Instead, I heard, 'We're going to fight this together.'"

After quitting, Evans discovered new interests. She participates in women's wellness and scrapbooking groups at Karmanos. She also participates in art therapy and makes birthday and get-well cards for Karmanos patients.

"I'd be in a much darker place had I not gone to Karmanos," Evans says. Today, I'm a happy, vibrant and independent person. I've been given another chance, and I'm going to live life to the fullest."

For more information, call 1-800-KARMANOS or 1-800-527-6266.

BONNIE EVANS