



## From the Executive Director: Think Before You Pink® and Our 25th Anniversary

By Karuna Jaggur, Executive Director



This October, in addition to our annual campaign pushing back on pink ribbon culture and marketing, we marked Breast Cancer Action's 25th anniversary—25 years of putting women's health first.

I was deeply moved and truly inspired by the energy and commitment of everyone who attended our 25th anniversary event in San Francisco, CA last month. It was humbling to see the BCAction community out in full force—founders' families, decades-long donors, former Board and staff members, and activists who have been with BCAction since the early days were there. Thank you to everyone who attended and gave so generously, and to those who couldn't attend but were there in spirit.

For those of you who couldn't join us, be sure watch our new video about our 25 years of activism: <http://bcaction.org/2015/10/10/learn-more-about-our-history-in-powerful-new-video/>

And here's an excerpt of my speech from the event talking about this year's Think Before You Pink® campaign, Poison Isn't Pretty:

"It's October. And we are once again pushing back on big pink, against hypocrisy, against profiteering off of breast cancer.

This year, one of our Community Leaders who is here with us tonight was concerned about a program for cancer patients that's advertised across the country in hospitals and clinics.

The Look Good, Feel Better® program provides tips to patients in active treatment to help manage what the program calls "appearance related side effects."

In addition to these tips, the program offers free goodie bags full of personal care products and cosmetics donated to cancer patients.

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For years, we've been pushing back on cosmetics companies putting pink ribbons on products containing hormone disruptors, carcinogens, and heavy metals.



The cosmetics industry has been a leader in pinkwashing since they put the very first pink ribbons on their toxic cosmetics. In the early 1990s when the creator of the pink ribbon turned down a partnership proposed by Self Magazine and Estee Lauder saying they were "too corporate" for her, the companies did what any good corporation does when someone says 'no'—they did what they wanted anyway! Their lawyers told them they needed to simply change the color of the ribbon. And focus groups told them that pink was soothing, feminine, and cheerful—as many before me have noted, everything that breast cancer is not.

And so peach became pink. And the focus on prevention—the purpose of the original ribbons—shifted to empty awareness.

For the Look Good, Feel Better program, the largest trade association for the \$70 billion dollar cosmetics and personal care products industry has partnered up with the nation's largest cancer charity—that's right, the American Cancer Society comes in at nearly a \$Billion dollars in annual revenue. They are working together to give toxic cosmetics to women in cancer treatment.

I want to be very clear that we are not telling women they shouldn't wear make-up. There is no one right way to go through breast cancer.

Whether we decide to go through treatment with or without a wig, with or without make-up, with or without prosthesis, it is each woman's individual choice.

However, as an activist organization, we are here to take action when we see a trusted nonprofit giving chemical-laden cosmetics and personal care products to cancer patients.

When our members started sending in their Look Good, Feel Better kits, we took a look at what is inside. Each kit is different, and they're not standardized so you can get anything in there.

In every kit we looked at, we found numerous chemicals of concern, including:

- hormone disruptors
- formaldehyde releasers
- poly-tetra-flouro-ethylene (PTFE for short)—that's what most of us know as Teflon.

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Yes, Teflon is in some of the products our members sent us because Teflon is considered a skin conditioner, and is used to smooth fine lines and wrinkles and ensure a smooth application of the product. Our skin is our largest organ – we don't want Teflon soaking in through our skin!

And the worst part is that many of the cosmetics and personal care products, including those in the Look Good, Feel Better bags, contain hormone disruptors. We know breast cancer is a hormone-driven disease. We know common treatments target the hormone system. Many scientists are concerned about the ways hormone disrupting chemicals in our daily lives can increase our risk of breast cancer.

It also turns out that one of the scientists in this room (Dr. Bill Goodson) did important research that found some hormone disruptors—including methylparaben which is in some of the products the ACS is giving to cancer patients—has been shown in a lab to interfere with Tamoxifen, one of the common breast cancer treatments.

It doesn't need to be this way.

The ACS and PCPC could take a stand to protect patients and to prevent cancer. They could simply say that any company that wants to be part of the program cannot use harmful chemicals that can increase the risk of breast cancer or interact with treatment.

Breast cancer is not pretty, no matter how many pink ribbons get attached—and no matter how many free cosmetics are given to cancer patients.

Too many industries and corporations exploit our concern about breast cancer for their profit with promotions that ultimately benefit corporations far more than they help women living with and at risk of breast cancer.

This matters, because despite the billions of dollars spent on pink ribbon products, 40,000 women still die of breast cancer each and every year.

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Within days of launching the campaign I heard from the heads of both organizations wanting to defend the program. And the Personal Care Products Council issued a press release about our campaign.

Since they can't show their products are safe, they basically just slung mud at us. It's an act of desperation.

They are feeling public pressure. We've had enormous response from the public and the media.

This is how we create change. By raising our voices together. By standing together to push back on corporate power. Because no matter how much mud – or dirty corporate money they are willing to throw around – we are stronger.

The American Cancer Society simply says that they believe "the benefit outweighs the risk". Benefit to whom? The cosmetics industry?

For 25 years, Breast Cancer Action has put women's health first to protect patients and prevent cancer.

Let there be no doubt. We will always do what it takes to stop women from dying from this disease. We will do what it takes to reduce every woman's risk of developing this disease in the first place.

Social change does not happen quickly. It takes time. And we are in it for the long haul.

When we stand together to demand change, change happens."

## A Powerful Pinktober—Not Stopping Until Our Work Is Done!

*By Alyssa Figueroa, Campaigns Coordinator*

This Pinktober, you helped expose the American Cancer Society and the Personal Care Products Council as pinkwashers for giving cancer patients toxic cosmetics. Your powerful voices, actions and stories said loud and clear that "Poison Isn't Pretty" and you revealed the truth about their hallmark Look Good, Feel Better® program.



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You, along with thousands of others, sent these pinkwashers your letters and shared your personal stories. You spoke out so loudly that the media couldn't help but cover our call to action. Outlets like *Jezebel* and the *New York Daily News* reported on our campaign, and we had op-eds published in *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post* and *EcoWatch*. And BCAction member Katy Skahill had her poignant op-ed published in *Truthout*.

The American Cancer Society and the Personal Care Products Council were forced to respond to our campaign, issuing public statements and press releases. Our reach was so wide that even the cosmetics trade association in the United Kingdom released a public statement.

Shamefully, instead of listening to the women they claim to serve and cleaning up their act, these industry giants doubled down on their poor excuses about the cosmetics used in their program.

But we're not stopping now.

Our Poison Isn't' Pretty campaign was just another step in our work to protect all women from chemicals linked to increased breast cancer risk. This work takes time. And together, we are in it for the long haul thanks to outspoken activists like you.

Last month, you were crucial in putting pressure on the nation's largest cancer charity and cosmetic industry's largest trade group. Now, we need your help expanding our base of activists to continue to fearlessly stand up for women's health.

Invite your friends and family to sign up for our action alerts today and stay tuned for our upcoming pushes to put public health over profit: <http://www.bcaction.org/signup>.

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## Action Center and Program Update: Fall 2015

In addition to our 2015 Think Before You Pink® campaign, Poison Isn't Pretty, we've been busy in the program department since our last newsletter. Here are some highlights of what we've been working on. For links to full articles, visit: <http://bcaction.org/2015/11/12/action-center-and-program-update-fall-2015/>

**Take Action: Demand Strong Chemical Safety Reform:** Each day, we're all exposed to chemicals that increase our risk of breast cancer. That's why we need true reform of our chemical safety laws which currently do not protect our health. An industry-friendly bill is set to make current regulations even worse, further endangering our health and further increasing our risk of breast cancer. This is unacceptable.

**Take Action: Support the Lymphedema Treatment Act:** Lymphedema is a common, debilitating side effect of breast cancer treatment. But not all women can afford the care they need. That's why we're joining our friends at the Lymphedema Advocacy Group in supporting the Lymphedema Treatment Act, which would require Medicare to cover lymphedema treatment. Tell your representative to support the Act today.

**Take Action: Ban Fracking on Public Lands:** More than 700 chemicals are used in the fracking process, and 25% of them are linked to cancer. That's why we're pushing for a fracking ban on public lands. Tell your Representative to co-sponsor the strongest piece of federal legislation against fracking to date.

**Watch: Free webinar: *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* and *STINK!*: Films that inspire change:** On this webinar Ravida Din, producer of *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* and Jon Whelan, director of *STINK!* talk about what motivated them to make these game-changing films, dig into the problems of pinkwashing and toxic chemicals, and give you some concrete tools and ideas about how to change the injustices these films address.



**Read: We Said NO to Speeding Ineffective and Unsafe Treatments to Market in the Name of Patients:** At Breast Cancer Action, we have been calling for more effective, less toxic

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treatments since our founding. Why then are we opposed to the 21st Century Cures Act, an optimistically-named bill currently before Congress that claims to help patients?

**Read: Statement Opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership:** At first glance, a huge international trade deal seems far removed from the fear and urgency of a new breast cancer diagnosis. But the highly contested Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) threatens the health and well-being of women, including breast cancer patients.

**Read: We Demanded the EPA Focus on Protecting Public Health—Not the Fracking Industry:** By downplaying its findings of water contamination from fracking, the EPA provided cover for the fracking industry to continue to poison our drinking water with chemicals linked to a variety of health problems, including breast cancer. When the EPA finalizes its study, they need to focus on protecting public health—not the fracking industry—by highlighting and condemning drinking water contamination from fracking.

**Read: American Cancer Society Screening Guidelines for Breast Cancer: Baby Step Toward Evidence-Based Recommendations:** After years of relentlessly promoting annual mammography for women age 40 and older and overstating the benefits of early detection, the American Cancer Society, the nation's largest cancer charity, is finally starting to follow the evidence on the limitations of routine breast cancer screening for women at average risk. This signals a decisive shift in the mainstream narrative about the harms and benefits of annual screening for women at average risk.

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## Welcome to New Board Member Sarah Douglas

*Our all-volunteer Board of Directors is a remarkable group of people who set the vision for BCAction and lead the organization by determining organizational policy, assuring the organization's financial security, and representing BCAction's views to the world at large. In September 2015, we welcomed Sarah Douglas to our Board of Directors and are excited to introduce you to her here. For information about our Board of Directors, visit <http://bcaction.org/about/board-of-directors/>.*

### Tell us a bit about yourself and what brought you to BCAction.

I live in Eugene, Oregon where I have been on the faculty at the University of Oregon for the past 32 years. I'm now an Emerita Professor of Computer and Information Science and almost fully retired. I moved to Oregon from the San Francisco Bay where I lived for many years. I have a partner, Marie, and a 21 year-old cat, Sammie. I'm a nature girl: I love to hike, swim and kayak in the Cascade Mountains near my house. I also love music and play the violin.



I am a big believer in the "personal is the political" and "our bodies, ourselves". When breast cancer came to me in 2013 at age 69, I personally experienced the politics of it along with the medical treatment. My younger sister Susanna, who was diagnosed with breast cancer 11 years before in 2002, warned me that cancer treatment was big business. As I struggled with trying to understand the treatment options available to me, what I got from my doctors was really a lack of information about exactly what those options were. I read *The Cancer Journals* by one of my favorite poets, Audre Lorde, with new understanding and found support for my anger about what was happening. I knew BCAction from contact with former executive director Barbara Brenner and I had made donations over the years. After my diagnosis, BCAction has been one of the important clarifying resources and means of action for me. I'm just thrilled to join the Board of Directors.

I want to give one example of how we as patients are presented with lack of information to make decisions. My breast cancer was eligible for analysis using the Oncotype DX test at a cost of \$4,000—an expense paid entirely by my Medicare insurance. When I was presented with a two-page faxed result that I could barely read, much less understand, I was told that I didn't really need to understand the statistics. Yet the statistics were the basis of whether I "should"

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have chemo or not. This was very disturbing to me. I was being asked to make a decision based on the difference between a 10-year distant recurrence rate of 19% vs. 15%. I didn't know what "distant recurrence" meant. I couldn't reason about 19% vs. 15% in ten years: they seemed very small numbers. My partner Marie, who has a PhD in math, finally found some vague information about how the statistics are computed from the data of a tumor. (For many of these new genomic tests, companies consider the actual formulas used to create the predictions a trade secret.) What I wanted was a discussion of benefits vs. risks tailored to me—a discussion my care providers seemed unable to provide. I also wanted to have evidence-based information—something I discovered is almost non-existent in cancer treatment. I was fortunate in finally working with a wonderful oncologist who was outside the local treatment center. She helped me feel more in control making decisions that were best for me.

### **What most inspires/excites you about BCAction's work?**

Social justice! I am very committed to grassroots, social justice causes centered on gender, race, and class. During the past 25 years, BCAction has built a reputation as a watchdog for breast cancer. BCAction is one of the only non-profit 501c(3) cancer organizations mostly funded by individual contributions. We do not take any money from corporations that profit from or contribute to breast cancer and therefore can be truly independent in giving out information and participating in activities to support social justice in healthcare. I love that BCAction is a feminist, grassroots national organization committed to social justice and standing up for patients before profits.

### **What are you looking forward to working on/what do you think are the most pressing issues in breast cancer?**

The more I study the medical and biological issues around cancer, the more I appreciate the complexity of the disease(s). There are many forms and types of cancer that we have barely begun to classify. Each has its own mutational basis from many different types of causes. The fundamental problem of cancer, the out of control rapid reproduction of cells, is a very difficult issue since cells must naturally reproduce. I don't believe there will be any quick comprehensive cures. Instead there will be a very slow process where each type of cancer is matched to possible treatments.

When I think about what are the most pressing issues in terms of prevention, diagnosis and treatment, here's what I think about:

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*Prevention.* I have come to believe that the most pressing issue for prevention is attempting to prevent cancer caused by environmental toxins and chemicals eaten and absorbed by our bodies. I believe that my own cancer could have come from being sprayed with DDT as a child living in the tropics. One of my sisters, who also has breast cancer, was also sprayed. (The visionary biologist Rachel Carson has special meaning for us not only because she spoke out against DDT; she died of breast cancer, too.)

Living in Oregon, I am also exposed to the timber industry practice of clear-cutting that includes the aerial spraying of herbicides atrazine, glyphosate, and 2-4-D (Agent Orange). Linked with endocrine disruption and possibly carcinogenic, this spraying has affected the health of rural communities of people, plants and animals as well as the drinking water for larger populations. Not surprisingly the Northwest has higher breast cancer incidence than the U.S. average. I am working with a group committed to reforming or even abolishing these forest practices here in Oregon. So far it has been an uphill battle and we did not succeed with legislative action this year.

On a more personal basis, I am participating in the NIH Sister Study. This is a long-term study of the environmental and genetic risk factors for breast cancer with a database of approximately 50,000 initially cancer-free women whose sisters were diagnosed with breast cancer. The really difficult problem with environmental and chemical carcinogens, and other risk factors, is that it is very difficult to show a cause-effect relationship. Exposure to a toxin has a certain probability of causing cancer and often doesn't present itself until almost a lifetime of accumulation. Toxins also combine with other factors in an individual and the environment in complex ways.

*Diagnosis.* We have got to come up with better and more innovative methods for diagnosis that do not rely on radiation, i.e., screening by mammography. It is very difficult to convince people to not have mammograms earlier and earlier in life. There is a huge amount of fear out there now—very justified because we are in the middle of an epidemic—but mammograms themselves have a limited risk-benefit ratio. I would like to see attention paid to diagnostic alternatives for women of different races for whom cancer may present itself in ways that are not necessarily like the norm for white women. For example, despite increased screening mammography for African American women, their mortality rates have not declined. Death rates for black women were 42% higher (2012) than for white women. Also, black women have higher rates of aggressive triple-negative than white women.

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I also think that the diagnosis of later stage metastatic breast cancer needs research. As someone diagnosed with early stage breast cancer, I have been told that I must wait and see if it comes to me in other parts of my body and to report anything unusual! What this suggests to me is that we simply have to spend more on the basic research of cancer itself and how it spreads within the body.

*Treatment:* CO\$T, CO\$T CO\$T. In general, most of our treatment methods are drug-based chemotherapy. I am incredibly concerned about the cost of these drugs and the monopoly and control that pharmaceutical companies have over determining treatment without evidence-based clinical testing. The average price of cancer drugs for a year is estimated to exceed \$100,000 according to a report published in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings by a group of 118 leading cancer experts. They have called for action including new regulations to control the high cost of cancer drugs. Even with health insurance, your out-of-pocket expenses may be as much as \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year. Many are left with having to decide between paying for cancer treatment and other vital needs. These costs have a huge impact on lower income people and given 1 out of 3 Americans have a lifetime chance of cancer, we are all at serious financial risk. A change.org petition launched by this report can be found at: <http://chn.ge/1DCWT1M>

Clearly, we need to develop other methods of treatment that are more sophisticated, rather than the toxic drugs for standard chemotherapy. As it is now, we barely have any effective treatment for metastatic breast cancer or for other reproductive cancers such as ovarian cancer. Although immunotherapy seems promising, it has not appeared to be very effective for breast cancer.

*Bottom Line.* I'm left with the fact that there is a lot of work for us in Breast Cancer Action. I look forward to joining with all the other incredible members who make up this powerful organization.

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## Special Thanks: Fall 2015

We could not do this work without the support of so many members and volunteers. A huge thank you to:

- **Sheila Kitts** for your continued generous support of our work through your amazing and creative graphic design work.
- **Dave Otten** for volunteering your creative talent and design skill to produce the decorations, and awards for the 25th anniversary event.
- **Ken Fischer** for consulting as a volunteer on the 25th anniversary video and bringing your valuable professional and personal perspective to the project.
- **Katherine Shea** for volunteering your time to support our “Poison Isn’t Pretty” campaign.
- **Morgan Jue** for volunteering to enter data for our “Poison Isn’t Pretty” campaign.
- **Katy Skahill** for inspiring us with your relentless demands for justice and authoring a powerful e-alert and op-ed for our “Poison Isn’t Pretty” campaign.
- **Marie Garlock** for representing BCAction with wisdom and poise on the radio, at the NC Environmental Justice Network, and all over North Carolina.
- **Alma Busby-Williams** for presenting our work on social justice and pink ribbon culture to students at Evergreen College.
- **Jeanette Koncikowski** and **Bridget Hallock** for your continued dedication to building community in Western New York through meetings, presentations and even potlucks!
- **Ravida Din**, producer of *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* and **Jon Whelan**, director of *STINK!* for your inspiring presentation on our September webinar, “*Pink Ribbons, Inc. and STINK!: Films That Inspire Change*”
- **Janet Nudelman**, Director of Program and Policy at Breast Cancer Fund and Director of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics for your engaging presentation on our October webinar, “What’s Hiding in Your Cosmetics?”
- All the **BCAction members who screened *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*** in your communities this fall.



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- **Alan Kleinschmidt** and the **San Francisco Choral Society** for generously providing tickets to your performances.
- **Sara Brandon** for your administrative assistance in the office.
- **Carrie Wong** for your office and administrative assistance.
- **Kirstin Arnold** for your help in the office and for gracing us with the presence of her beautiful baby girl!

## Donations in Honor and Memory: Fall 2015

*Every day, Breast Cancer Action receives gifts honoring those who are living with or affected by breast cancer. We also receive contributions to honor the passionate advocates, volunteers, medical professionals and leaders of the breast cancer movement.*

*Many donations also memorialize those who have died of this disease. Each gift made in honor and memory will be used wisely by Breast Cancer Action to end the breast cancer epidemic.*

### *Donations Made in Honor*

*BCAction gratefully acknowledges donations made in honor of the following individuals between May 25, 2015 – November 13, 2015.*

Abigail Arons  
from Wendy Mnookin  
from Melissa Robin

Alba Giron  
from Kathryn Gilje

Allison Brisbin  
from Kathleen Krust

Anne Somsel  
from Raymond Carlson

Aunts Ha and Hang Dang  
from Tin Do

Barbara Brenner  
from Gerald Epstein

Billie Loulan  
from Gardner Loulan

Brenge/Paul Wedding  
from Kathryn Brengel

Corinne Lamata's birthday  
from Sarah Clift  
from Patrick Delahunt  
from Lorinda Drysdale  
from Ann-Marie Hogan  
from Marian Silva  
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Cris Cottey  
from Sara Emery

Dana Howeth  
from Priscilla Rosenwald

Deb Wiedenheft  
from Trish and Jo-Ann  
Morales

Deborah Behrakis  
from Carole Mendelsohn

Denna Muller  
from Jo Ann Muller

Diane Olds' mother  
from Carroll Estes

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from Melissa Robin  
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from Kimberly Friedman  
from Kathleen Krust

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Laura Corb  
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Lisa Marks  
from Linda Marks

Liz Miller  
from Emily Hoyer

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from Paulette Saunders

Many Brave Women  
from Elle Hoffnagel

Marianne Novy  
from Liz Carrier

Marika Holmgren  
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Stevenson

Marsha Grande  
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Megan Olsen  
from Michelle Solomon

Melissa Adams  
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Nancy Osborn  
from Mary Jean Babic

Naomi Grupp  
from Beth A. Grupp

Rose Brown  
from Linda Sue Johnson

Sandra Steingraber  
from Julia Brody

Sarah Douglas  
from Joan Hutchinson  
from Marie Vitulli

Sarah Fenner  
from Rosemary Barlow

Sharon Russell  
from Kimberly Friedman

Sonia Varma Arora  
from Usha Varma

Sue Wilson  
from Eileen Schwartz

Susie Lampert  
from Jobyna Dellar

The Moyce Family  
from Thao Nguyen

Tracy Weitz  
from Carroll Estes

Wave Geber  
from Mitchell Gillman

Yvonne Gibbons  
from Mary Modeste

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from Barbara B.  
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from Stephanie  
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from Sally Joughin  
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from Faith Meixell  
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