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IWU Celebrates Breast Health Awareness Month Speaker to highlight healthy measures to prevent breast cancer

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. --In conjunction with the nationally recognized Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Illinois Wesleyan University celebrates Breast Health Awareness throughout the month of October. In connection with other educational efforts on campus Laurine Brown, Ph.D., will present: "Hope: Lighting the Pathways to Prevention of Breast Cancer on Monday Oct. 29 at 7 p.m. in room 101 of the Center for Natural Science, 201 E. Beecher St., Bloomington. Brown has worked with nutrition and health programs in the United States and other countries for over 20 years. Her presentation is free and open to the public.

"Breast Health Awareness Month is an attempt to understand the things women can do to minimize risk of breast cancer, but also an actual call for the understanding that more research dollars need to be allocated to understanding the cause," said Missy Smock, IWU's Wellness Center director. "Not enough energy and resources are dedicated to preventing breast cancer. Though it is really important to find a cure, at this point in time we want to stay healthy and not ever have to face the path that those with breast cancer have to follow."

Breast cancer rates have risen steadily by 1 percent per year in the last half century despite mammography becoming more widespread, a fact Brown attributes to environmental factors people are not warned about, which include "radiation (a proven cause of cancer) or any of the 80,000 post World War II synthetic chemicals dancing with our biology."

A breast cancer survivor herself, Brown's presentation will summarize research on environmental links to increasing breast cancer rates, including the suspected role of environmental estrogens, other chemicals, radiation and diet. Brown notes that a search for the causes and means of breast cancer prevention have been largely overshadowed by the race for a cure and early detection.

"A Scandinavian study of 44, 788 twins tells me that environmental factors play a much greater role than inherited genetics in susceptibility to most types of cancer," Brown said. "Consistent with this, we know only five to 10 percent of women with breast cancer inherit altered genes. Adding risks, like reproductive and family history, we account for less than 40 percent of this epidemic."

According to Brown, the National Cancer Institute allocates only five to 10 percent of its budget to prevention. Most funding goes towards better treatment, cures and genetics.

"We're ignorant of how these unnatural materials interact in our cellular symphony. But strong animal and some human evidence suggests we should be very concerned," Brown said.

In an effort to promote breast health awareness, Brown will highlight steps based on a "precautionary principle" that individuals can take to reduce exposure to suspected toxins that may promote breast cancer.

"Any woman or any person with a woman they love in their life will benefit from this program," Smock said. "Even breast cancer in men is uncommon as compared to women, but it is also increasing. There is no easy solution. It is a very challenging situation."

Brown received her bachelor of science degree in hospital dietetics from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana in 1978 and went on to earn a master of public health degree from Boston University School of Public Health in 1985 and a doctor of philosophy degree from Tufts University School of Nutrition in 1992. From 1978-79, Brown worked in acute clinical and outpatient nutrition care, research and food service management as a general intern.

Brown currently serves as a nutritional counselor with Healthy Connections in Bloomington where she provides nutritional counseling to adults, children and families through private practice. She also is the co-founder and co-director of Living Upstream, McLean County, a not-for-profit citizen group dedicated to educating and empowering the public about health and environmental issues while promoting safe alternatives to toxic practices.

For more information contact Smock at 309/556-3334.