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Article 8

From fake breasts to hats, shop offers cancer victims one-stop shopping
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CHICAGO (AP) - Diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma at 25, Lisa Kaplan-Melnick spent a year at home sick from chemotherapy. Even when she felt well enough to go out, shopping wasn't as much fun.

"Salespeople were too busy staring at my bald head to wait on me," she said.

So after six years of being cancer-free, Kaplan-Melnick opened a boutique called Magic & Vanity for female cancer patients. It's among a growing number of shops featuring goods such as high-cut bathing suits that cover mastectomy scars and special hats with bangs attached to disguise baldness.

Kaplan-Melnick's clients, who range from 16 to 80, also include burn victims and women who have otherwise lost their hair. The shop employs people who have suffered from cancer or cared for someone with the disease.

The goal is to make the customers to feel at ease.

"It's OK to lose your hair here. You don't have to apologize if you leave your hair in a hat," Kaplan-Melnick said as she modeled a beret that covered the nape of the neck and sides of the head.

There are more than 1.6 million breast cancer survivors in the United States today, according to the American Cancer Society. About 596,600 women will be diagnosed with cancer this year - about 30 percent of whom will have breast cancer, the group said.

Many stores across the country carry prostheses and wigs, but relatively few cater specifically to women with cancer, said Emily Downward of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation in Dallas.

"Such stores really emphasize the positive, and, you know, try to encourage the woman that she still is as beautiful even though she doesn't have her hair and eyelashes," she said.

There are about 200 stores in the country catering to women with cancer, far more than a few years ago, said Penny Martin, founder of the Women's Health Network - a coalition of such independent boutiques.

Magic & Vanity offers an array of products including wigs in myriad styles and colors (\$180), prosthetic breasts (\$175 to \$500), and handsome, breezy dresses loose enough to conceal chemotherapy pouches or bellies distended from liver or ovarian cancer (\$150).

Kaplan-Melnick and her employees also show women how to apply makeup to skin that flakes off or is blotchy and sensitive because of chemotherapy.

Liz Cohen of Chicago went to Magic & Vanity looking for a wig. She noticed Roslynn Marre standing behind the counter and said she thought it was in poor taste to have such a strikingly beautiful woman working with people who have lost their hair - until Marre whipped off her wig and showed she too was bald.

"It really dispelled all my 'ugly' images," Cohen said.

Cohen, a corporate banker, suffers from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. She did not lose her hair in her first round of chemotherapy, but knows it will fall out when she has a bone-marrow transplant in the spring.

"I'm going to lose my eyelashes and eyebrows. I don't want to go into a place - particularly a public place like Marshall Fields - and go to the employee and go 'I'm going through chemotherapy, and I have to learn to draw eyebrows,'" she said.

Dr. Anne McCall, a radiation oncologist at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill., said patients need to feel good about themselves.

"We can't assume that just because we cure someone of their cancer that we can ignore the side effects of the treatment that cured the disease," she said.

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