

In Touch With Stars / Cancer magazine relies on celebs, humor

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Abstract:

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Full Text:

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Paul Newman, Rosie O'Donnell, Joe Torre, Harry Belafonte and Hillary Clinton are among the celebrities who smile down on Randi Londer Gould in her comfortable office, which also affords a commanding view of the Long Island Expressway.

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Its advisory board is dominated by MDs with impressive credentials. Its newest affiliate is the Hamptons Comedy Festival.

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(All InTouch issues are available at www.intouchlive.com.)

Early on, Gould says, the magazine's founder, John A. Gentile, who has since retired, "decided, let's put celebrities on the cover, to bring people into the tent, because people really do listen when celebrities talk. A good example is Betty Ford," who was on last November's cover. "It's not a stretch to say that she's the mother of all cancer advocacy... There was such a surge in women going to their doctors to get mammograms" after she revealed her breast cancer and mastectomy in 1974.

Gould put Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, who had prostate cancer, on her second cover in 1999: "If the general tells you to get your prostate exam, to bend over and take it like a man, you listen."

The magazine is part of PRR Inc., which Gentile founded about 25 years ago to publish scientific and professional journals and books in the oncology field. "Jack always wanted to 'give back, as it were, and have a magazine for patients," Gould said. She had been a freelance medical writer and written a book for the firm. "When Jack proposed this magazine, it was just too rare and wonderful an opportunity to turn down - to start something from the ground up, to give it your own vision, that was just irresistible. "

Her goal, she says, is to provide authoritative information: "Readers know they'll get the complete picture," she says. But she also strives to put it in an entertaining context, complete with sidebars, reviews of medical Web sites, regular columns (including new additions InFlamed, on smoking, by Andrew Holtz, and Survivor's Notebook, by Emily Hoffinan) and, of course, celebrities.

She's gotten a wide array of them to sit for portraits and interviews "through connections, through persistence, through begging, through whatever it took ... We've had some amazing luck." The celebrities, including the ones on the covers on her office walls, generally have either been diagnosed with cancer (such as current cover subject Geraldine Ferraro, fighting a rare blood cancer called multiple myeloma) or are advocates because of special interests, relatives or friends (such as upcoming cover subject S. Epatha Merkerson of "Law and Order," who had friends die of lung cancer).

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A related article counseled cancer patients on "how to handle others without increasing your own burden." Tips included understanding that some accusatory comments, such as "Why didn't you have that mammogram?" are "a kind of emotional shield," with the subtext, "I had a mammogram. I'm not 'going to get cancer. "

Gould, the magazine's only full-time staffer (others are shared with PRR's professional publications), maintains a passion for her job. She can recall details from virtually every article, and has had each cover mounted in complementary colors by her favorite framer in Huntington village, where she lives with her husband.

The three other cancer magazines for lay people she knows of, Coping, Mamm and Cure, are all relatively small. But attention is growing, she says, because of an aging population, "patients who want to participate in their health care" and more treatment options.

"There are unfortunately a million and a half newly diagnosed patients every year, and 10 million cancer survivors, which is a happier number. That is a huge audience, and we should be reaching more of them." The magazine originally aspired to a larger circulation, but a poor economy and privacy issues (getting patients' names) have kept it small. It's still in a start-up phase, she says, and, compared to, say, Talk, which "flamed out after two years, we're still here after three years." It's among the survivors.

(Illustration]

Caption: Photo by Thomas A. Ferrara - Randi Londer Gould, editor of Melville-based InTouch, aims for a "complete picture" for patients.

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