For a lot of women, there is...

life after breast cancer

...a good life

“I have to leave a little early so I can pick up my wig.”

On a torrid Tuesday afternoon, those were the words of a cancer victim to hospital team members as she left the Rehab Department of Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center. The woman had experienced the side effects of chemotherapy.

Well into the Breast Cancer Program, nurses, therapists and specialists at the center were providing treatment and education for cancer victims. They were women, mastectomy and lumpectomy patients, who had surgery four weeks ago or more. The youngest woman in the class was 26. The oldest was 76. They had to get approval from their physicians to be admitted.

Louise Ledoux of Opelousas, 76, is one of many women who have survived breast cancer.

“I had my surgery 21 years ago. There have been many changes in treatment since I left the hospital with nothing in my bra for a breast form,” she said.

Post-operative therapy wasn’t offered then, few visits if any came from recovery volunteers, and there wasn’t much chance to speak with others about the disease.

Talking to friends and professionals about the ailment is very important, according to breast cancer experts. It eases the stress and controls the fear about having breast cancer. Today, in addition to her regular household duties, Louise is an avid church worker, sings in the choir, and gets plenty of exercise by walking. No one would call her a cancer patient. She lost that stigmatic title years ago.

Diane Broussard, Vermilion Parish Public School System employee, had cancer when she was 29. From participating in her own personal battle with the disease, she discovered something very positive about the experience. The Abbeville native claims that even though breast cancer victims go through a lot of suffering, worry and stress, a special gift of love comes from people who really care about them. For instance, when she was recuperating from surgery, many friends sent her cards. One was inscribed “We’ll weed your flower bed until you feel better.”

“They endeared words taught me how precious life really is,” she replied. And she added, “As a result of that message I am no longer such a perfectionist about things.”

Women at Lourdes meet twice a week and participate in 16 sessions that last 8 weeks. The program that continues throughout the year is free and people are welcomed into it at any time. Talks from medical experts last 30 minutes and they are held prior to the meetings. Topics include group exercise, energy conservation techniques, edema control, prosthetics, diet, pharmacy, plastic surgery and nursing education. Pastoral care and social services also are on the agenda. “A Day of Beauty” and “The Home Program” ends the sessions.

According to Beth Harris, a nurse working with the rehab group, the program is designed to help people learn to live with cancer at a greater level of independence and with an improved quality of life.

And, after several visits to the facility, one can definitely understand that the program is set up to educate all women whether or not they have breast cancer.

So: Check yourself often, get check ups from your physician, and see about getting your mammogram whenever the doctor tells you that you need one.