

# Burnaby woman forms Deep Vein Thrombosis support group

BY JANAYA FULLER-EVANS, BURNABY NOW AUGUST 3, 2011



Brenda Blackburn, an outpatient of Burnaby General Hospital's anticoagulation program, has formed a deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism support group in Burnaby.

**Photograph by:** Larry Wright, BURNABY NOW

When Brenda Blackburn noticed her right leg was sore one morning in June 2008, she ignored it, as many people ignore minor aches and pains.

"I woke up and thought I had a pulled muscle," the Burnaby resident says in a phone interview. "I had no idea what it was."

Two weeks later, Blackburn went to the doctor, just prior to a cross-country flight. She says she's lucky she did.

"It would've killed me, probably," she says.

Blackburn was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis, also known as DVT - a blood clot from her knee to ankle - and ended up in the emergency room.

Air travel is a risk factor for blood clots.

She also found out in the hospital that she had a pulmonary embolism, where a portion of the clot had traveled through her heart and into her right lung.

The doctors told her she was lucky to be alive.

"It's very terrifying," she says. "You think you're fine the one minute and then you're told you could die."

There are nearly 300,000 lung blood clot related deaths in the United States per year, according to a research study by Dr. John Heit at the Mayo Clinic.

Deep vein thrombosis affects more than 380,000 people in the U.S. per year, according to the National Alliance for Thrombosis and Thrombophilia.

Blackburn has since been diagnosed with Thrombophilia, a genetic condition that increases the tendency of her blood to clot.

When she was first diagnosed, she began researching DVT and found very little information in Canada, she says.

So she started a support group for survivors of DVT and pulmonary embolism at the McGill Burnaby Library branch.

The group has done well, with about 60 members on its page on the Meetup website, and about 20 more members who aren't online, she says.

Blackburn has had so much interest that she's looking at expanding to the Fraser Valley, and plans to register the group as a non-profit in the near future.

"It's amazing how many people have lost someone to this," she says.

The condition has changed her life, Blackburn adds.

"I'm now on this mission to spread awareness," she says. "This group has been life-changing."

So far, Blackburn has funded the group herself, and with coffee-can donations. She sends resource packets to people who have suffered from DVT or a pulmonary embolism, out of her own pocket. Most recently, she sent one to the U.K., she says.

"It's a lot to run this, on top of a day job," she says.

But she adds that it is worth it.

"It's quite scary for people," she says of the condition.

Blackburn was initially treated at Burnaby General Hospital, and was a patient at the hospital's outpatient anticoagulation program.

The program was formed from a research project in 2004, according to coordinator Leilani Todorovic.

Patients who are stable come through the clinic from the emergency room, usually diagnosed through an ultrasound or a CT scan, she says.

They are treated with a bridging treatment, an injection that works to break down the clot right away,

and a Warfarin anti-coagulation pill, which takes an average of five to seven days.

If the cause of the clot is known, Todorovic says, it usually takes three to six months of monitoring and treatment until the patient is better.

But if the cause results in recurring clots, the patient needs lifelong treatment, like Blackburn.

Risk factors for DVT and pulmonary embolism include air travel, taking birth control pills, some types of surgery or cancer, obesity, and smoking. Pregnant women are also more at risk.

Blackburn is inviting survivors of DVT and pulmonary embolism to join the DVT Support Group of the Lower Mainland through [meetup.com](http://meetup.com). The group's next meeting is Sept. 28, and she asks that those interested RSVP in advance.

"We're here and we'll help anyone, throughout the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, and beyond," she says.

She is also looking for volunteers as she looks at starting a group in the Fraser Valley and expanding.

Anyone who would like a resource package with information on the conditions is also welcome to contact her, at [brenda@brendablackburn.com](mailto:brenda@brendablackburn.com).

More information is available at [brendablackburn.com](http://brendablackburn.com).

© Copyright (c) Burnaby Now