

Breast cancer patient reaching out to others

Lori Rackl

When breast cancer patient Maureen Lutz had a mastectomy in 2005 at the age of 57, the Connecticut woman "felt very lost prior to the surgery."

Doctors didn't really tell her what to expect. She wasn't prepared for how difficult simple tasks like cleaning herself or reaching for a glass of water would be after surgeons removed and reconstructed her breast.

"When I came home from the hospital, I kept telling my sister I wish I'd been better prepared for my own care," said Lutz, who's on a mission to ensure other mastectomy patients -- including some here in Chicago -- aren't left in the dark.

Lutz has put together a Necessities Bag for these women. It includes a booklet she wrote in layman's terms called "The Woman to Woman Guide to Prepare for Mastectomy." The bag contains a pad of paper and pen to take notes, lip balm, Life Savers candy, tissues, a water bottle and soft bandages, among other things. There's also a soft, handmade pillow that can be tucked under the arm to relieve pressure post-surgery.

"It all comes in a tote bag that isn't pink," Lutz said. "There are no logos on it to tell the world you just had a mastectomy."

Lutz came to Chicago last month as part of the nationwide Warriors in Pink tour sponsored by Ford Motor Company. One of her stops was Swedish Covenant Hospital on the city's North Side. The hospital's foundation donated \$1,000 to cover the cost of Necessities Bags for patients. Hospital volunteers will assemble the bags, which will be distributed by doctors and nurses. Evanston Northwestern Healthcare also is handing them out.

"This little idea has started catching on across the country," Lutz said. "My hope is one day, this will be available to mastectomy patients everywhere."