

# I ALWAYS HATED PINK, ANYWAY

From when I was 6 until I was 16, in two different houses, my bedroom was painted pink. I don't think I ever liked the color, but I learned to



loathe it along the way, even if it was just my parents' half-hearted attempt to encourage me to be girly.

But I suspect that's only a part of the reason why, as a breast cancer survivor, I learned to hate the pink ribbons purportedly serving my interests.

It may have been when Eureka developed an ad campaign around the pink ribbon. I was less than thrilled that Eureka tried to use my cancer as a reason to sell women more vacuum cleaners along with their stale gender stereotypes.

But I think the moment when I most realized that the cancer industry was about turning breast cancer patients into profit centers came when I went to a Komen-funded Young Survival Coalition conference. The organization itself—focused on breast cancer resources for those diagnosed under the age of 40—was a godsend. But the conference insisted on calling us patients and survivors “customers.”

Customers, I thought (as I got the swag bag full of drug marketing gimmicks). I'm a customer because I have cancer?

Though we conference attendees had our revenge at the session sponsored by Genentech, the maker of the anti-nausea drug Kytril. As the speaker thanked “Genentech, maker of Kytril,” someone

yelled out “it doesn’t work.” And another. Then me. And another. And another. It took getting a bunch of us in a room together to compare notes and learn that a bunch of us found the \$50/pill medicine to be less effective than older drugs.

You have to be a shrewd customer to survive cancer without getting fleeced.

Komen just pretended to reverse its decision defund Planned Parenthood’s cancer screening services (it promises only to consider PP applications in the future, not to fund them). And, as Greg Sargent reports, they deny that Nancy Brinker did anything wrong.

But now that everyone has become aware of Komen’s sleaziness, it’s time to look at what they—and the cancer industry—do more generally. They fund efforts to diagnose and find a cure but—as this excellent diary describes—they work against things like prevention. They also tend to push back against research that shows we’ve been over-diagnosing and over-treating breast cancer. (I know such studies are controversial, but as someone who learned only after my treatment that European countries would have treated my case very differently, for a fraction of the cost and invasiveness, but with statistically equivalent outcomes, I take them seriously.)

One of the leading breast cancer doctors and advocates, Susan Love, had this to say Tuesday.

Rather than putting politics into the breast cancer movement, lets rise above the political divisions and work together. Let’s redirect all the money that will be spent on investigating Planned Parenthood into funding studies looking to find the cause and prevent the disease once and for all. Let’s redirect our anger to making mammograms unnecessary because we know how to prevent the disease.

We ought to use this scandal to examine more

closely where cancer money gets spent—on treatment, turning cancer patients into customers—and rarely on prevention.

While I appreciate the gesture, pink ribbons to me have come to symbolize cancer patients as profit centers, both for consumer goods capitalizing on an association with the goodwill (and Komen), as well as for ungodly expensive drugs that don't always provide better outcomes. They've come to symbolize the same kind of passive compliance I think of when I remember those damn pink walls.

It's time we aspired to stopping cancer, not just throwing tons of increasingly expensive drugs and consumer products at it. And that, in turn, means finding some other entity besides Komen to take the lead.