

Project LEAD, La Jolla, San Diego, California, July 2012

Leadership Education Advocacy Development

I first heard about Project LEAD when I first met Maggie. She has been prodding me to apply ever since. This year I felt it was the right time, so submitted my application to attend the LEAD institute in California in July.

Much to my surprise I was accepted along with Pat Fairbrother, so with only about 3 weeks to go we had to get our travel organised. I reached the course venue the evening before we started so only had one night to get over my jetlag; Pat rather sensibly arrived the day before.

The week started on Sunday afternoon with an overview of what to expect and introductions. We were then thrown straight in at the deep-end with a lecture on immunology – we were definitely out of our comfort zone!



For the rest of the week we started at 8am with lectures interspersed with study group discussions. The study group sessions were great. Any worries about understanding some of the science were easily gone over in the small group. Each group had a mentor who was an experienced LEAD graduate plus one of the teaching staff. My group was great and we gelled immediately and had we helped each other get to grips with the trickier areas of genetics and DNA.

Each evening after dinner Pat and I (who were roommates) would prop ourselves on our beds and go over the work for the following day and by about 10pm we were sound asleep!

The level of teaching was very high and I was so impressed that the commitment our tutors gave to the whole week. It was not a case of someone coming in giving a lecture and leaving. They were there all week and attended all lectures. It was never assumed that we knew anything and I never felt that they did not enjoy the whole experience as much as we did.

I am not sure how much of the science I will remember, but I know I will remember something and have some excellent notes to back me up. I am sure that as time goes on I will realise that some facts will have taken root and that I can understand some of the science that we are faced with and hopefully make myself more effective.

What I know I will remember is the wonderful people I met and the commitment they all have to breast cancer research. The experience has also shown me that although the delivery of health services is very different between the UK and the US the problems and issues we have are the same. We need to be able to share our experiences and get the best from both systems.

The course was held in the most beautiful setting, so when not in class we were able to stroll around glorious gardens in the sun to recharge the batteries and chat with each other in the Californian sun.

The course ended on Friday and by mid-afternoon most of the new grads had headed off for home. I was not leaving until the following morning, so went for a long hike to the sea and strolled through the pacific surf considering myself very fortunate.

If anyone is interesting in applying next year please let us know or look on <http://www.breastcancerdeadline2020.org/learn/project-lead/>

Mairead MacKenzie

July 2012

