

ROSE KUSHNER, ADVOCATE FOR CANCER PATIENTS, DIES

By Sandy Rovner, January 9, 1990

Rose Kushner, 60, a psychologist and journalist who while valiantly fighting for the rights of breast cancer patients became a recognized authority on treatments, died Jan. 7 at Georgetown University Hospital. She had breast cancer.

She lost her battle with the cancer about 16 years after she refused to authorize a mastectomy before she knew for sure that the lump she had found in her breast was malignant. As it turned out, it was, and she eventually had the mastectomy.

But her experience prompted an unceasing campaign for the rights of women to participate in the decisions involving the diagnosis and treatment of their cancers. The so-called two-step procedure, in which a woman is told the results of her biopsy before any further decisions about surgery or treatment are made, is now routine virtually throughout the world. Much of the credit for this has been ascribed to her efforts.

She wrote half a dozen books and brochures on breast cancer including "Alternatives: New Developments in the War on Breast Cancer" published in 1985, an update and expansion of her 1976 book "Why Me?" She also wrote numerous articles for local and national publications. She founded and headed the National Breast Cancer Advisory Center and, most recently, organized BreastPac, a political action advocacy, lobbying and fund-raising organization.

In 1980, Mrs. Kushner was appointed by President Carter to the National Cancer Advisory Committee, on which she served for six years. She was appointed last year to the American Cancer Society Breast Cancer Task Force. She had received dozens of awards for her work, most recently the Layman's Award from the Society of Surgical Oncology for "outstanding contributions to the fight against cancer." That award was to be presented in May.

She was well known in the medical oncology community for her stubborn, often fiery determination to prod physicians to move ahead in their treatment of breast cancer, a disease she believed had been woefully ignored. Although she was basically a private person, she did not hesitate to use her own medical history to advance her cause, adding to her credibility, but not without a loss of her own privacy. She was particularly concerned that quality of life considerations were

not given enough priority and that many women were unnecessarily subjected to harsh chemotherapy.

She was instrumental in the organization of the National Institutes of Health consensus conferences on breast cancer and promoted the use of hormonal therapy, rather than chemotherapy, long before the former had worked its way through the approval process.

Mrs. Kushner, a Kensington resident who had lived in Montgomery County since 1955, was born in Baltimore. She attended Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore Junior College and Montgomery College. She graduated with honors from the University of Maryland in 1972.

In 1967, she covered the Vietnam War, accredited by the Baltimore Sun, Washingtonian magazine and the Montgomery County Sentinel. Peter Lisagor, the late Chicago Daily News columnist, wrote from Vietnam that Mrs. Kushner "has been able to surmount the difficulties of Saigon traffic in an increasingly depressing campaign to find out what the United States is doing wrong. Her tentative conclusion is 'everything.' "

Mrs. Kushner's survivors include her husband, Harvey, of Kensington; two sons, Gantt, of Wheaton, and Todd, of Rockville; a daughter, Lesley Kushner of San Francisco; and three brothers, Isaac and Meyer Rehert, both of Baltimore, and Paul Rehert of West Palm Beach, Fla.