

# Komen's good work overshadowed by controversy

**By Christopher Gunty**

What are the folks at Komen thinking? Perhaps the better question is: Are they thinking at all, or are they allowing themselves to be swayed by political pressures?

For years, Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (now known as Susan G. Komen for the Cure) has raised awareness and funds to fight breast cancer. Those ubiquitous pink ribbons that you see weren't Komen's idea, but were spurred on to popularity by distribution of pink ribbons to every participant in Komen's 1991 Race for the Cure. Pink ribbons, hats, visors, shirts and what-not have helped bring needed attention to the cause.

I lost my mom to breast cancer in 2005. She fought it off once; it came back. I have six sisters, a wife, a daughter and now, two granddaughters. I hope and pray for the day when breast cancer is eradicated so that all the women I know and love will no longer be threatened by this disease. In 2006, my daughter and I walked 60 miles in three days as a tribute to my mother. I used to think that Komen, with the strength of its massive organization, could change things for the better. Now I've lost that confidence.

I had seen the concerns that noted that Komen gave some grants to Planned Parenthood affiliates in some states for mammogram screening programs for low-income women, especially Hispanic women whose needs were underserved in this arena, and I did my research. While I realize that in many ways, a restricted grant - for example, for a mammogram program - allows a nonprofit organization to use its unrestricted funds to be used for whatever purposes it deems fit, it seemed that the amount of the grants were minimal compared to the amount Komen was raising across the country over the years. If, indeed, women were being screened for breast cancer, that was a good outcome.

And Komen claimed that it was not fully endorsing Planned Parenthood, even though

it also dismissed on its website any link between abortion and increased risk of breast cancer. It would seem that an organization seriously concerned about any and all aspects of breast cancer research would want to look at the recent studies that indicated a possible link between abortion and breast cancer, and perhaps fund more studies, before dismissing such a link out of hand.

Then came last week's news that Komen had chosen to stop giving grants to Planned Parenthood while it was under investigation by Congress. Reports noted that Komen was enforcing two key components of its grant guidelines: not to fund organizations under investigation and to fund only programs that provide direct services – apparently Planned Parenthood did not actually provide some of the mammogram services, but farmed those out to another provider.

However, the immediate backlash from pro-choice advocates allowed Komen's leadership to show their true colors. They followed the politics of the day and the dollar signs, and they reversed their decision so fast, heads spun. They failed to consider how many more dollars a wise, life-affirming choice might have brought them from pro-life donors who have held off their involvement. Instead, they've made their choice clear: Where before, the connection to Planned Parenthood was peripheral, now it is conscious, definite and deliberate. They have sided with Planned Parenthood. The decision was extremely loud and their relationship is now incredibly close.

There are few, if any, other organizations making similar efforts to support cancer research, education and treatment that are acceptable to those who have moral reservations about abortion and other life issues that also have the reach and scope of Komen. The Breast Cancer Prevention Institute ([bcpinstitute.org](http://bcpinstitute.org)) has some research and fact sheets, especially on the abortion-breast cancer link, but no major activities. The largest other organization to hold awareness and fundraising walks appears to be the Avon Foundation, which will hold the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in nine cities in 2012. Its website notes that the Avon Walk is not affiliated with Komen and that in the last five years, of the 3,000 grant applications received, only one was from a Planned Parenthood affiliate, and it did not receive funding. At press time, a call to Avon Foundation requesting additional comment had not been returned.

Breast cancer is a serious issue for so many women, and so many families. We do well to support research and education to find prevention and a cure. But we also need to do that in ways that uphold human life and dignity. Last week, the folks at Komen made a choice. You can make a choice, too.