



Information Guide
Updated January 2019

Starting a Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Team

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1. Introduction

So, you want to start a breast cancer dragon boat team?

The International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission (IBCPC) has produced this document to:

- assist you in understanding what it means to start a team;
- provide you with information on the origins of the breast cancer dragon boat movement;
- explain the aims and objectives of the IBCPC; and
- provide guidelines and suggestions for the formation of your team based on the experience of members worldwide

Please note these guidelines have been written to meet the specific needs and protect the well being of breast cancer survivors.

The IBCPC recommends you contact your local/regional dragon boat association for general information about dragon boating in your area.

1.1. Origins of the Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Movement

Breast cancer dragon boat paddling began at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada in 1996. Dr. Don McKenzie, a Professor in the Department of Sports Medicine and exercise physiologist challenged the prevailing medical thinking that women treated for breast cancer should avoid rigorous upper body exercise for fear of developing lymphedema, a debilitating and chronic side effect of treatment.

Dr McKenzie developed a programme to determine the impact of exercise on breast cancer survivors, choosing dragon boat paddling as the epitome of strenuous, repetitive upper body exercise. He invited twenty-four breast cancer volunteers ranging in age from 32 to 64, from a variety of backgrounds, and with a full range of fitness and physical ability to join him. He trained the volunteers in a gym for three months, introduced them to dragon boats and taught them paddling techniques. At the end of the three-month season on the water none of the volunteers had lymphedema.

While Dr. McKenzie's medical project was complete, the women found they were fitter, healthier and happier. They loved the camaraderie and support of their fellow paddlers and had regained control of their lives. They realised dragon boat paddling could become a means of raising breast cancer awareness and show that survivors could lead normal lives. They named their team '**Abreast In A Boat**' and invited other survivors to enjoy the benefits and share their exciting experience.

The invitation was taken up: the following year, 1997, there were five breast cancer dragon boat teams in Canada. The movement has since grown – today we have over 225 teams across 24 countries and 6 continents!

These teams continue to reflect the guiding principles laid down by Dr McKenzie in 1996 - they are as diverse in their membership in terms of age, physical ability and background now as they were then. They are open and inclusive to all with the common factor - a diagnosis of and treatment for breast cancer.

These teams have paddled in different countries including New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Penang, Italy, France, Canada, USA, Australia, Poland as well as many others, taking their message with them. They have come together at International Festivals three times over the last eight years. At the first, Ten Years Abreast, in Vancouver (2005), the Australians caught the spirit and in 2007 paddlers flocked to Caloundra, Queensland as they did to Peterborough, Ontario, Canada in 2010, Sarasota in USA – 2014, and most recently Florence, Italy in 2018. On each of these occasions for three fabulous fun filled days, the teams, averaging 2000 – over 3000 people in all, and each a breast cancer survivor celebrated on land and water. They paddled, laughed, danced, talked, shopped, listened, learned, supported, sang, paraded, made friendships and renewed friendships.

It was agreed that these Festivals characterized by their inclusiveness and camaraderie should continue. In June 2010 at the Peterborough Festival, member teams approved a Constitution and By-Laws to formally establish the International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission. The Commission is also affiliated with the International Dragon Boat Federation which supports the Commission.

1.2. The International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission (IBCPC)

The IBCPC is an international organisation whose mandate is to encourage the establishment of breast cancer dragon boat teams, within the framework of participation and inclusiveness. The IBCPC has developed and maintains a communication network for breast cancer dragon boat paddlers across the globe. It supports the development of recreational dragon boat paddling as a contribution to a healthy life style for those diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer.

As the breast cancer dragon boat movement grows internationally, it has a unique opportunity to raise awareness about the disease and about life after breast cancer. A full and active life is possible: the IBCPC was created to spread this message. Together we are stronger, our voices are louder, and the message is clearer.

1.3. Aims and Objectives of the IBCPC

- To help people with a diagnosis of breast cancer understand that they can still lead full and active lives despite physical limitations imposed by breast surgery and treatment.
- To encourage people to “achieve their dream” of regaining an active, adventurous lifestyle despite a diagnosis of breast cancer.
- To give a “face” to the breast cancer statistics by participating in regattas and other events as breast cancer teams.
- To promote wellness, fitness, fun and camaraderie for breast cancer survivors.
- To develop and maintain links with other breast cancer dragon boat teams and other paddlers internationally.
- To promote early detection and diagnosis.
- To always encourage the search for the cause and the cure.

2. What to Consider When Starting a Team

There are numerous factors to be considered when starting a breast cancer dragon boat team.

2.1. Who Should Lead?

The IBCPC strongly recommends that the people starting and working with a team have a close association with breast cancer. Ideally, those who have been diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer should be the leads. The IBCPC also recommends that medical personnel who understand the implications of breast cancer treatment should be available for consultation by paddlers. And, most importantly, every potential paddler should have contacted their own physicians before they begin training to paddle.

2.2. Form a Committee

Your new team will need to have a working group or committee. Try to find enthusiastic people who have some committee experience.

Initial activities will include researching local dragon boat clubs (See 2.3), recruiting medical support, a coach and paddlers (See 2.4) as well as calculating expenses and planning how to cover those expenses.

As a guideline your working group should comprise the following:

- Coordinator
- Treasurer
- Secretary

2.3. Contact your Regional Association

Before starting a new dragon boat team, you need to contact your regional dragon boat association. It will be able to guide you on the rules and guidelines for setting up a dragon boat team and for paddling in your area. If there is no local dragon boat association please contact the IBCPC directly. www.ibcpc.com

2.4. Recruitment

There are numerous places and organisations where you can recruit your members. Key contacts include:

- Local breast cancer support groups;
- Breast cancer organisations;
- Hospitals – especially those that treat those diagnosed with breast cancer; and
- Media – community newspapers, radio, etc.

Also consider holding a meeting that is advertised to promote the idea of developing a breast cancer dragon boat team.

2.5. Equipment

Newly formed teams often do not have any equipment (boats, paddles etc) and it can take time to raise the necessary funds to purchase these items. Our recommendation is to initially join a local dragon boat club that can supply you with all the equipment as well as the expertise you may need to get a team started.

Right from the outset get members together and start some training/exercise as a team at the local pool, or park or a gym. One of the great benefits of bringing breast cancer survivors together is the camaraderie and support each can provide each other, not to mention the fun!

Many a team has started this way. If you want your own boat it can take months, even years to raise the funds or you may decide to continue to use your local clubs and put your efforts towards other awareness activities.

2.6. Gain Community Support

Community support can prove invaluable in the formation and subsequent support of your team. Make contact with potential supporting organisations. Should you be fortunate to find a sponsor make sure you will be able to fulfil your obligations to them.

If you are fundraising, ensure you are clear as to what you are raising funds. If you are raising money for equipment be clear this is the intent and that you not raising money for breast cancer.

If you are unclear about this contact www.ibcpc.com for advice.

2.7. Value Your Supporters

Supporters can be invaluable in assisting you to get your team up and running, as well as provide ongoing support.

When you are beginning to recruit your team members you may find that you do not have enough breast cancer members so you may consider inviting your supporters to paddle with you. The goal is to eventually have every team member a person diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer. Indeed, for the IBCPC Festivals all members of the crews must be breast cancer survivors and this includes the drummer and steersperson.

3. Training and Safety

Paramount to starting a breast cancer dragon boat team, training and safety is a **must** for all potential members.

3.1. Training Information

Paddlers need to have made significant progress in their recovery both physically and mentally from the treatment phase of breast cancer. It is recommended that paddlers be at least six months post treatment before beginning the training programme. Paddlers must consult their family physicians before beginning the programme.

The physical training program consists of two phases: the dry land portion, usually in the gym and then the on-the-water portion. The dry land training is in preparation for the second phase and should be started a minimum of three months before paddling can begin. The dry land training should also continue, in a modified fashion, during the paddling season. Dry land training is the most important component to improve your strength as a paddler and prevent injury.

This programme has been designed specifically for those who have been treated for breast cancer and whose upper body has therefore been compromised.

The programme focuses on building core strength. It has four objectives:

1. Your commitment to exercise: adoption of exercise into your daily routine is not only healing but has been proven to reduce risk of recurrence. Regular exercise improves the immune system and helps to maintain a healthy body weight.
2. Improved flexibility: stretching exercises should be done for each major body part.
3. Improved strength and enhancing core stability: increased upper body strength and core stability are necessary for the on-the-water training.
4. Improved aerobic fitness: cardio respiratory fitness is improved significantly by the paddling and it is to your benefit to include this aerobic fitness in your fitness programme. Choose an activity that uses as much body mass as possible such as walking or jogging, cycling, swimming, cross country skiing or take an aerobic class. Remember to include a gentle warm up and close down session at the beginning and end of each workout.

Here is a list of the exercises and stretches. Please ensure you have proper instruction and supervision when you first begin doing them.

- Seated Row
- Bench Press
- Lat Pull
- One arm bent over rowing
- Tricep Extension
- Bicep Curl
- Back Extension
- Abdominal work including exercises such as planks and crunches. Yoga and Pilates could prove beneficial for focusing on one's core.
- Lots of stretching exercises especially for the upper body.

3.2. General comments about the training programme

Lymphedema is a concern and compression sleeves should be considered when paddlers are commencing this programme. Again, review this matter with your physician.

If you are new to the gym make sure you get the proper training and supervision when using the equipment and doing the exercises.

Each work out will require 30 to 40 minutes three times per week combined with aerobic exercise for about the same amount of time.

Go slowly. Progress is best made in a slow gradual fashion. Start with minimal weights and progress will be made. We have a good track record for avoiding lymphedema so the supervised, graded exercise program is an important part of prevention for this condition.

Paddlers who train throughout the year are less likely to develop any physical problems.

Train together with one or two of your new paddling friends. This makes it more fun and gives you an incentive as you can not disappoint your friend by not turning up.

Coaches should monitor the rate of progression to minimize the potential for injury.

The paddling is fun. You do not have to paddle hard; you just have to paddle together. Dragon boat paddling is an inclusive and participatory experience and anyone can do it safely and enjoyably if they have had the proper training.

3.3. Paddler Safety on the Water

At the first meeting of your crew, and before you get into a dragon boat, it is imperative each crew member understands the water safety rules. These rules should be reviewed many times until everyone fully understands their responsibilities.

Here are some suggested guidelines for establishing those rules.

- Appoint one person to be responsible for the safety routine and equipment. Equipment includes an extra paddle and life jacket, bailers, a ladder as well as a cell phone, with appropriate emergency numbers in a weatherproof container. It is important to have members familiar with CPR.
- Each team member should give a designated team member (safety person or captain) a card containing the following information:
 - Paddler's name address, phone number;
 - Name and phone # of two contact people; and
 - Medical information—any chronic condition, plus a list of allergies, and all medication being taken.

This information should be held in a waterproof container, it should be carried by the designated team member and be accessible at all team events both on and off the boat.

Each crew member must wear an approved life jacket and clothing appropriate for the weather.

At every practice and all events each paddler will have a 'buddy' who is their seatmate. Should the need arise buddies are responsible for each other and the first row will be responsible for the drummer and the last row for the steersperson.

Ideally paddlers should be 'water safe' which most often means they can swim at least 100 meters. Sometimes there are paddlers who do not swim, and that information must be known to the coach, captain and steers as well as the paddler's seatmate/buddy.

Coach and captain are responsible for the orderly loading and unloading of the boat.

Each crew should have a minimum of 16 paddlers before a crew can go out for a practice.

Procedures should be known by all paddlers in the event someone falls overboard or the boat is swamped or overturned.

4. Become a Member Team of the IBCPC

Once you are on the way, your team can apply to become a member of the IBCPC. This will provide you with news, the Newsletter and updates, give you the opportunity to share information and best practice with other teams as well as giving eligibility to participate in our International Festivals.

Go to the website to download an application form www.ibcpc.com

4.1. IBCPC Website

www.ibcpc.com

This is our showcase to the world and is maintained on a voluntary basis. We welcome news, pictures or information about you and your team that we can post for teams around the world to read and enjoy.

4.2. IBCPC Newsletter

The IBCPC produces a quarterly newsletter to all member teams and those who have subscribed. We invite any interested persons to subscribe to the newsletter. Go to our website to subscribe and please encourage your members to do the same.

4.3. IBCPC Facebook

Yes we are on facebook. We would love to see you there.

4.4. 2022 IBCPC Participatory Dragon Boat Festival

Venue to be decided in 2019. Breast cancer paddlers from around the world will come together to laugh, sing, dance and paddle. You must be a member team of the IBCPC to register.