

How to Start a Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Team



BREAST CANCER DRAGON BOAT NETWORK

**UN RÉSEAU DE BATEAUX-DRAGONS POUR PERSONNES
ATTEINTES DU CANCER DU SEIN**



How to Start a Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Team

Acknowledgements

This manual is the collective insights and experiences of the authors. With their knowledge, passion, and love, they create an inspiring adventure through the sport of dragon boat paddling. There IS a full and active life after a diagnosis of breast cancer.

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INTRODUCTION

Being on a dragon boat with others diagnosed and treated for breast cancer is one of the most stunning and amazing experiences one can ever have. These boats are full of happiness, laughter and especially hope.

As the team camaraderie brings joy, breast cancer dragon boating builds strength as it restores emotional and physical confidence to the person affected by the disease, to her/his family and friends and to the community at large. Paddling in pink or fuchsia shirts creates breast cancer awareness and sends a message of hope.

Starting a new team is a challenge, and this manual will guide you along the way to creating your new team. As you go through the manual, you will find medical and historical aspects; you will also find tips on how to start your new team, how to train before getting into the boat, and how to make your team successful. The manual introduces general guidelines that can be adjusted to any circumstances.



Breast cancer dragon boat paddling is changing attitudes about life after breast cancer. It encourages both the men and women who have been diagnosed and treated for this disease to lead full and active lives. It is making a “difference.”

Dr. Don McKenzie. Founder and coach of the first breast cancer dragon boat team: Abreast In A Boat, Vancouver, Canada 1996.



PART 1

Medical Background

From the very beginning, this program was about breast cancer-related upper extremity lymphedema. In 1995, the prevailing medical opinion was that even modest exercise using the upper extremity would cause lymphedema, and for that reason, there were severe restrictions on activities for women treated for breast cancer. The original goal of the program was to show that high-intensity upper body exercise would not result in lymphedema, and dragon boat paddling was chosen as it represented a highly visible challenge to that myth. The only criteria to join the team was a diagnosis of breast cancer; age, paddling experience, fitness, etc. did not matter. This was not about sport performance; it was about women's health.

A few years after *Abreast In A Boat* began, exercise as rehabilitation in the breast cancer population began to attract attention. I suspect this was, in part, because of the visibility of the women paddling within the *Abreast In A Boat* program. An oncologist who was very supportive of exercise for her patients and I opened a *Cancer Gym* in Vancouver. This was done with the conceptual and financial support of *Abreast In A Boat* who have included research as part of their mission. The gym supports research in exercise oncology, and much of it is done in partnership with other Cancer Centres in Canada. This has been very successful and will continue once the Covid-19 pandemic is under control and it is safe to do so. It was this research, supported by other Centres globally, that demonstrated the benefits of exercise in the breast cancer population.

Exercise is a therapeutic tool. It is also a challenge and will expose the weak links in fitness and in health. In my opinion, exercise is so important it should be 'Standard of Care' as an integral part of treatment in the breast cancer population; we have more than enough data to support that inclusion. We know that an exercise program during treatment has positive effects – fewer hospitalizations, less neutropenia (low white cells), less fatigue, pain, anxiety and depression, improved sleep, maintenance of fitness, improved muscle bulk and bone health. Regular exercise appears to help in preventing some of the side-effects of specific drugs on heart function (cardioprotective effect), and it may help reduce 'chemo-brain' in women following treatment for breast cancer. The most important effect is the well-documented, scientifically- proven 38% risk reduction of dying from breast cancer and a 48% reduction in all-cause mortality. That is quite a benefit for doing something that you enjoy!

Donald C. McKenzie, MD, PhD

How It All started

A Canadian legend and an international movement was launched when twenty-four women, all of whom had been treated for breast cancer, slipped into a dragon boat for their first paddle. It was early 1996 in Vancouver, Canada.

These twenty-four women were strangers to each other. We ranged in age from thirty-two to sixty-four and came from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities: a nanny, a doctor, a bookseller, healthcare professionals and educators to name only a few. All different sizes and shapes and various levels of athletic experience. Many of us had little of the latter. We had no idea we were soon to become lifelong friends, sharing a remarkable experience of paddling, camaraderie, joy and celebration. How did this happen?



In those days, the prevailing medical wisdom was to warn breast cancer patients to avoid any repetitive upper body movements in order to prevent lymphedema, a painful, debilitating and irreversible condition thought to be brought on by over-burdening our upper bodies, especially our arms and hands.

Edie is a nurse, and every time she lifted a patient, she remembered her doctor telling her not to lift more than ten pounds. Sandra, who spent her recreational time canoeing with her husband, was told never to do that again. We were even warned against the dangers of sweeping, window cleaning and, heaven forbid, vacuuming!

Most of us had had the stuffing knocked out of us with our treatments. We felt we had been on a medical conveyor belt that often felt more like a roller coaster. Then when we were finally off that belt, we were told we must then consider how to live a normal life – one where we would be forever "handicapped" by a lack of strength and mobility in our upper bodies.

And then we met Dr. Don McKenzie, a sports medicine physician and now Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Don had started noticing that, when he saw breast cancer patient in his Sports Medicine Clinic and recommended a gentle graduated exercise program to treat their injuries, he was told by those patients that they had been informed by their own doctors that such a program was not advised for people who had been treated for breast cancer. Don did his research and found absolutely no medical evidence that a well-supervised exercise program would cause lymphedema.

Don decided to test his theory that exercise would be beneficial as part of a recovery regime after treatment. Twenty-four women volunteered. We were introduced to Don and his two colleagues, Diana Jespersen and Sherri Niesen Magee. The three of them were a powerful team. We could tell instantly that Don was a kind, humble, confident, and clever doctor. His great sense of humour was evident too. At that first meeting, Don showed us a video of the False Creek Women's Dragon Boat team which had won world class medals. Most of us thought he had sped up the video to intrigue us! He had not.

Don and his colleagues were cautious and careful with us, advising us to wear compression sleeves and measuring our arms before and after every practice. We were sent to the gym for three months, something many of us had never done before. The first time we were in the boat on the water for an hour and a half; we paddled for only fourteen minutes.

Finally, the big race day arrived in June 1996 – The International Alcan Vancouver Dragon Boat Festival! When we left the dock, there were a few dozen family and friends cheering us on. When we hit the finish line, fourth out of five, there were thousands of people cheering. We were the first breast cancer dragon boat team in the world! We were beside ourselves! We had a new-found confidence in our bodies. We knew that, if we could do it, anyone diagnosed with breast cancer could too.

At the end of that first season, everyone was healthier and fitter, no one had contracted lymphedema, and the two paddlers with a pre-existing condition said their lymphedema was actually better. The first chapter of what has now become a medical story about lymphedema and exercise for breast cancer patients had just been written; many more were to come. We had dispelled a medical myth!

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First Abreast In A Boat Crew. Photo provided courtesy of the Abreast In A Boat archives.

After that first season, an equally important chapter related to the psychological well-being of people who had been treated for breast cancer and had paddled was about to be written. Here's how.

We had among our team members a brilliant social worker, Kate. She loved the paddling as much as the rest of us. And she noticed something else. Kate saw a group of complete strangers transition into a bonded group of women in just three short months and knew this was a phenomenon she wanted to document. She asked us to participate in a study with one of her colleagues, Paule McNicoll, about the impact our paddling had had on our attitudes, on our sense of self and on our general well-being. We could not say yes fast enough!

Kate asked us to consider what dragon boat paddling meant to us, to our family and friends. Had it made a difference to our lives, and if so in what way? Had we learned things about ourselves through our paddling? Had our relationships changed?

When the paper^[1] was published, it was a clear endorsement of the remarkable experience we had just had. We had taken control of our lives. We could do what we wanted to do. No longer were we afraid, and neither were our families. Up until then, many of us had felt that we had just been treading water. Now when we got into that boat, we were going to either sink or swim; treading water was no longer an option.

Several months after our first season, Shannon, one of our young paddlers got sick again. We were devastated, and so were our families. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea ... Then our wise friend Kate reminded us that "an adventure is not worth having if there are no dragons." Well, we had met our dragon. Some of us were going to live and some of us were going to die. All of a sudden, we were no

1 - Paule McNicoll, "As If By Magic: Women with Breast Cancer, Dragon Boats and Healing in a Group," in *Creating Connections: Celebrating the Power of Groups*, eds. Lucia Berman-Rossi, Marcia B. Cohen, and Holly Fischer-Engel (London: Whiting & Birch, 2010), 87-103.



longer afraid. There is a great quote from the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*: “Get busy living or get busy dying.”² We were really busy living, and if we had to die, we could do that too.

In the boat we pulled together, sang together, laughed and cried together, all the while joyfully paddling the waters of False Creek in Vancouver, surrounded by the mountains, the sky and the often rainy weather.

We had done it! We had broken the silence and conquered our fear of breast cancer. We recognized the gift this paddling experience had been. We decided it needed to be shared with other breast cancer survivors. We told Don his six-month project had a good deal longer life span than he had envisioned at the outset. He did not hesitate for one moment to support us. And, we all could see that it was not just the physical paddling that had created this phenomenon; the paddling had given us the vehicle we could use to regain control of our lives.

After that first year, Abreast In A Boat’s goal was to recruit people who had been treated for breast cancer to join the dragon boat experience. We told them that we were going to introduce them to another world where they would find fitness, camaraderie, support and friendship among a group of people who had shared similar experiences. A floating support group, “all in the same boat.”

Don McKenzie continued with his research, further exploring his theme: *Exercise is Medicine*. He has proven that regular exercise will reduce the risk of recurrence by as much as 40%. Don continues to be our biggest supporter and is respected all around the world by both paddlers and medical practitioners. We continue to spread our message around the globe. Today there are breast cancer dragon boat teams on all six habitable continents and in over 30 countries!

Jane Frost, Founding member

About Dragon Boating

The History

The dragon is an ancient Chinese creature that has been venerated and honoured as the sacred ruler of rivers and seas. Although fearsome and powerful, the dragon was also considered a benefactor that provided rain and prosperity to the farmers when spring came.

One of the most popular stories which tells the origin of dragon boat festivals is that of Qu Yuan. Qu Yuan was a respectable and loved statesman, poet and patriot in the state of Chu during the Warring States Period of ancient China. Filled with despair by the political situation and the sorry state of his countrymen, on the fifth day of the fifth month of 278 BC, Qu held a rock to his chest and threw himself into the Miluo River. Local fishermen raced out in their boats to try to save him. They beat their drums and splashed their paddles to scare away the fish so that they would not eat his body. Dragon boat races are said to re-enact the call of the drums to rally the villagers to rescue Qu Yuan in a show of community spirit.

Although dragon boating has been a traditional water activity in China for more than 2,500 years, it only started as an international sport in Hong Kong in 1976.

² - *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont (United States: Columbia Pictures, 1994).

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Today, there are nearly 50 million participants in China, over 300,000 in UK and Europe, 90,000 in Canada and the USA, many thousands in Australia and New Zealand.³ Several new teams are forming in South America. Dragon boating has become an exciting and popular sport, known for its stunning beauty and the camaraderie it engenders.

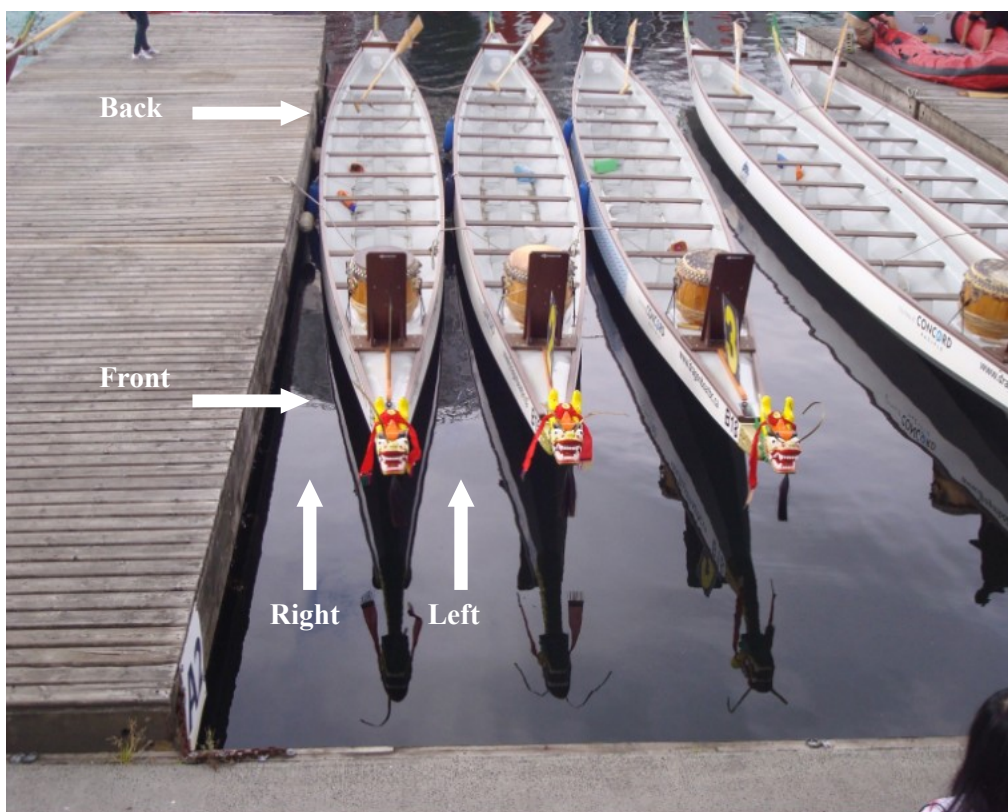
The Dragon Boat, The Team and The Crew

Dragon boats are generally about twelve meters long and powered by twenty paddlers. There are smaller nine-meter dragon boats for ten paddlers. The boats are embellished by a majestic dragon head and tail.⁴

A dragon boat TEAM consists of at least twenty two members or twelve depending on the boat size. On the other hand, a CREW consists of the team members who paddle together as one group. One team may have different crews and the crew may change from one practice to another.

A dragon boat crew consists of:

- the paddlers
- a drummer who sits high at the bow looking toward to the paddlers, helping the crew to paddle together in sync in order to move the boat in a stable and efficient manner
- a steersperson who stands at the back and is in charge of steering the boat with a long oar.



Twenty-Paddler Dragon Boats

3 - International Dragon Boat Federation, "History And Culture", last modified 2016. <https://www.dragonboat.sport/history>

4 - International Dragon Boat Federation, "Manufacturers' Licensing Schemes for Racing Dragon Boats and Racing Paddles, Attachment 3 to the IDBF Competition Regulations." Last modified Dec. 2013. <https://www.dragonboat.sport/manufacturers>



The paddlers sit together side by side. There are ten seats on a twenty-paddler boat. Each seat is named based on its position in the boat, starting with the seat closest to the drum designated as seat One; the seat closest to the steersperson is seat Ten. The paddlers seated in seat 1 are called the strokes; they set the pace for the rest of the paddlers to follow.

The paddlers who sit from seat one to four are called the Fronts, seats five to seven are the Engine Room while and seat eight to ten are the Backs.

Seated in the boat and looking towards the front, the paddlers seated on the left are “Lefts”, and paddlers seated on the right are “Rights.” For the boat zones see the figure above.

Ideally, all paddlers will learn to paddle both sides, but physical limitations will determine a paddler’s most comfortable paddling side. Coaches will be aware of this situation when assigning seats.

The beauty of the sport is that there is not an individual star in a crew. It is about the effort of each person on board and the most she or he can give.

Coaches and Paddlers

It is best if the coaches are also breast cancer survivors. They will then become knowledgeable about dragon boat paddling techniques so that no injuries occur. They will also create an enjoyable environment for the crew. The coaches must consider the diversity of the paddlers in order to understand their individual limits while still challenging them to help the team to achieve its goals. There are available resources online to help anyone interested in learning and improving their coaching skills. The coach does not need to be an athlete, but should be a person who enjoys learning, sharing their knowledge and the overall activity of dragon boating.⁵ Ref. [3], Section 5.

It is important for paddlers to train at home or at a gym before getting into the boat; this will help them to get fit to paddle and fully enjoy the experience.

Practices

Practice requires preparation. The coach needs to plan each practice ahead of time and also have a long-term plan. A practice normally includes:

- an on-land warm-up
- an on-the-water warm-up
- a practice core of on-the-water drills and paddling
- an on-the-water cool-down
- an on-land stretching session

The duration of a practice is about two hours.

Paddling Technique

Dragon boat paddling technique differs from that of kayaks or canoes. In fact, dragon boat paddlers use strenuous and repetitive movement which is favourable for persons who have been through breast cancer treatment. The following site gives a visual reference on the paddling technique:

https://youtu.be/Wv_4PDz_KWM⁶

5 - Arlene Chan and Susan Humphries, *Paddles Up! Dragon Boat Racing in Canada* (Toronto, Natural Heritage Books, 2009), Section 5.

6 - 22 Dragons, "How To Paddle – Dragon Boat Technique", YouTube Video, 3:08, May 19, 2015, https://youtu.be/Wv_4PDz_KWM

Festivals

There are different types of dragon boat festivals around the world. Whether large or small, they show that dragon boating is a community sport. Teams are formed by youngsters and elders, women and men. Community teams including visually-impaired paddlers and breast cancer paddlers among others are bridges for awareness and improvement of quality of life.

Breast cancer teams race in participatory regattas. With their pink or fuchsia shirts, they attract the attention of the public cheering from the shore. Dragon boat paddling is a way for us to show strength and to generate breast cancer awareness in the community.

Traditions

The Awakening the Dragon Ceremony

Awakening the dragon is a ceremony with religious roots. It is about awakening the dragon after a long sleep during winter. Generally, a Taoist priest conducts the ceremony with chanting to ward off evil spirits. Blessing the boats and the burning of paper money and incense makes the boats strong and fierce for the races which will follow.⁷



Dragon Boat Awakening Ceremony

⁷ - Arlene Chan and Susan Humphries, *Paddles Up! Dragon Boat Racing in Canada* (Toronto, Natural Heritage Books, 2009), Section 1.

The Eye-Dotting Ceremony

The Eye-Dotting Ceremony in modern times involves community dignitaries awakening the dragon by dotting the dragon's eyes with red paint. Red is the color that symbolizes heat, summer and fire; it also represents good fortune and prosperity.⁸

The Flower Ceremony

This tradition started back in 1996 as a gesture of camaraderie that evolved into an official ceremony in 1998. Since then, this ceremony has been held after every breast cancer final regatta. The breast cancer crews raft together in their boats, floating side by side. During the ceremony, pink or fuchsia flowers are tossed into the water by the crews, supporters and the general public on the shore. It is a moment to remember and to honor those women and men who have passed away from breast cancer and those who are still fighting. It is also a moment to celebrate life.

Adriana Bartoli



Flower Ceremony. Vancouver, Canada. 2014

8 - Arlene Chan and Susan Humphries, *Paddles Up! Dragon Boat Racing in Canada* (Toronto, Natural Heritage Books, 2009), Section 1.



How to Start The Dragon Boat Team

Define the Mission Statement and Purpose of the Dragon Boat Team

- Determine how you want to express your team’s mission statement and purpose. As an example, Abreast In A Boat’s (AIAB’s) mission is “[t]o raise awareness about breast cancer and to demonstrate that those who have been diagnosed with breast cancer can lead full and active lives”⁹ and their purposes are “...to improve the physical and psychological well-being of people who have had breast cancer and to provide support to people whose breast cancer has recurred and to support breast cancer research.”¹⁰
- Invoke passion in your mission statement and purpose, not only for your team members but also for potential sponsors, supporters and your local community.
- Your team will be composed of, if possible* all breast cancer survivors (BCS) – the paddlers, steers, coach and “team liaison” in order to create the feeling of a safe haven, understanding and strength together.

*It is recognized that supporters or survivors of other cancers may be invited to paddle with the team until there are sufficient breast cancer survivors to paddle as a viable BCS team.

Find the Right Place to Paddle

- Identify bodies of water that work for dragon boat paddling:
 - Are there there other paddling clubs in the area? If so, where do they paddle? Do they have a boat?
 - Download a paddling app or check out some suggested paddling locations on websites
 - Consider the following factors that may affect a venue’s desirability:
 - Is there parking access and what is the cost?
 - Is there a safe space for your team to warm up and cool down?
 - Can you rent a dragon boat at this venue? If you already have a dragon boat, is there a nearby dock where you can moor your boat? If so, what are the moorage fees? If not, would it be possible to partner with an existing paddle club if one is in the area?
 - What restrictions, if any, are there concerning the day/time that you can use this venue?
 - Is the venue safe from large boat traffic?
 - In the event of an emergency, could first responders locate your venue?

9 - Abreast In a Boat Society (Canada), *Team Manual* (Vancouver, BC, 2019), 6.

10- Abreast In A Boat Society (Canada), *Constitution*. (Vancouver, BC, 2016), 1.



Find Your Team

- Contact other paddle or canoe clubs if there are any in your area, or contact a local governing federation.
- Connect with local cancer associations and doctors in order to find potential team members.
- Bring awareness of the benefits of exercise and cancer rehabilitation by providing links to relevant medical articles. For example:
 - [Abreast In A Boat – A Race Against Breast Cancer](#) ¹¹
 - [The Effectiveness of the Sport “Dragon Boat Racing” in Reducing the Risk of Lymphedema Incidence](#) ¹²
- Prepare flyers/brochures to leave at doctors’ offices and clinics, physio and massage therapy offices, specialty lingerie shops, etc. These could also be left at more general venues, e.g., libraries, pools, community centres.
- Spread the word through your own circle of friends.
- Attend markets, festivals and parades to recruit and to promote the team.
- Set up a Facebook/Instagram page for the new team and follow other BCS dragon boat team pages.
- Post ads online and/or on social media.
- Create public service announcements for local radio stations. Prepare relevant articles of interest and recruitment messages for local print/online newspapers and your community’s social media page.

Build Your Team

At the outset, you will want to have these minimum numbers in mind to form your new team:

- one Coach (two is better)
- one Steersperson (two is better)
- one Manager (two is better)
- Paddlers – a minimum of twenty paddlers for a twenty-paddlers boat; a minimum of ten paddlers if you have a ten-paddlers boat
- Keep in mind that many BCS festivals require all crew members to be BCS, including the steers.
- Supporters and sponsors – the more, the merrier!
- Note health considerations:
 - Ensure your team members are cleared by their doctor for paddling activity.
 - Offer those who are not yet medically cleared an opportunity to join as non-paddling supporters until they have their doctor’s approval.

11- D.C. McKenzie, “Abreast In A Boat – A Race Against Breast Cancer,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)* 159 no. 4 (1998): 376-8, <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/159/4/376>

12- L. Iacorossi, F. Gambalunga, S. Molinaro, R. De Domenico, D. Giannarelli, and A. Fabi, “The Effectiveness of the Sport ‘Dragon Boat Racing’ in Reducing the Risk of Lymphedema Incidence: An Observational Study.” *Cancer Nursing* 42, no. 4 (2019): 323-331. doi: 10.1097/NCC.0000000000000615. PMID: 29933309. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29933309/>



Fundraising

- Everyone must help with fundraising efforts once you have a team assembled.
- Reconnect with doctors' offices, cancer associations, hospitals, community centres as these may be potential sponsors and/or could also provide leads to possible sponsors.
- Obtain donations and/or sponsorships for necessities such as:
- safety equipment (PFDs, first aid kit, dry bag, etc.). See Part 2 for a list of safety equipment.
- a dragon boat and the ongoing costs to maintain and store the boat, if you cannot rent one from a local paddle club

Future fundraising goals may include:

- raising funds to make a donation to a specific cause or charity
- training opportunities or clinics for team members (e.g., coaches, steers or drummer)
- offsetting registration and/or travel costs to take part in dragon boat festivals

Lynn Sparling, Eydie Walls



"Every individual matters. Every individual has a role to play. Every individual makes a difference."

Jane Goodall



PART 2

On-Land Training Guide

The physical activity/exercise continuum

Sedentary ⇒ *Health* ⇒ *Performance*

While we appreciate the role that exercise plays in a healthy lifestyle, most do not realize the impact of a lack of physical activity. Sedentary lifestyles increase all causes of mortality, double the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and obesity, and increase the risks of cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, lipid disorders, depression and anxiety. Not a pleasant picture and all related to simply doing nothing. The traditional recommendation of ‘take it easy’ is not without risk.

Habitual physical activity reverses the effects of a sedentary lifestyle and also has a significant effect on the breast cancer population. The data is impressive; this is the 38% decrease in recurrence rate and the 48% reduction in all-cause mortality! Moderate levels of regular physical activity improve the immune system, aid in fighting infection and likely play a role in preventing and fighting cancer.

For many paddlers, the decision to emphasize performance is a natural progression. In most cases, dragon boat training leads to competition and the natural inkling is to do your best. The changes in the training program, necessary to make performance the primary goal, can be significant. The urge to challenge oneself is admirable. However, it’s important to understand that the rewards of success come with higher risk of injury, increased mental stress of competition and, with true high-performance training, a compromised immune function. The decision to pursue winning should be made as a team, and every member must understand the goal.

Training Principles

There are valid medical reasons why some people should not engage in strenuous exercise. Individuals with high blood pressure, heart or respiratory disease, and severe arthritis can aggravate these medical problems with intense exercise. Dragon boating is hard work, and you must have medical clearance prior to beginning this program. If you have any medical concerns about this program, the time to address them is now, prior to commencing the training program.

It is necessary to recover both physically and mentally from the treatment phase of breast cancer. Hopefully you have been able to exercise during treatment, and this helped you through that period. Nevertheless, there are positive physiological/medical adaptations that take place after treatment is complete, and it takes several months for these to occur. The side-effects of chemotherapy and radiation can also take several months to resolve. Many patients are anaemic after chemotherapy, and the white cells produced in the bone marrow are not capable of responding rapidly to an infection. The mental stress of treatment needs time to settle. There is variability among participants, but I recommend delaying the start of the paddling program for at least two months after completion of therapy. You should continue to exercise and build strength and fitness, but the added stress of paddling should be delayed.

Pursuing a healthy lifestyle is intuitive, and there are several components that you have control over. Not smoking is an important one, and the other factors that you control are nutrition and physical activity. Sensible eating, avoiding fad diets, and regular exercise are proven ingredients in a healthy lifestyle.



The current published exercise guidelines for all breast cancer patients are to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week, plus two workouts that involve strength training. This is not specific to dragon boat paddling but is a good place to start.

The most important principle in improving and maintaining fitness and health is COMMITMENT.

Improving strength, flexibility and cardio-respiratory fitness are not difficult measures to achieve. What is required is time and COMMITMENT. It is well-documented that physical activity rates among cancer patients remain low, with reports that less than half of cancer patients meet the suggested physical activity guidelines across multiple countries worldwide. This is disappointing given the significant return for the investment of exercising regularly. Working out with a teammate and paddling with a group of other breast cancer survivors helps in this regard.

With respect to the dragon boat program, another important principle is INCLUSION. The original program was directed solely at improving women's health in novice paddlers. This is a principle that should not be forgotten. There needs to be a seat on the boat for women who are new, unsure of this activity, unable to paddling vigorously for any reason, and for those women just interested in paddling for health – without a focus on competition. No one should be left on the dock.

The important components of a training program are:

Aerobic fitness: Cardio-respiratory fitness is improved significantly by paddling, but it must be developed before the paddling season begins. Aerobic fitness involves improving the function of your heart and lungs; there are many activities that you can use to do so. Choose a routine that recruits as much muscle mass as possible; walking/jogging, cycling, swimming, cross-country skiing, aerobic classes and rowing (ergometer) are examples of suitable activities. Your aerobic program should start with a 10-minute warm up, followed by continuous activity for 30-45 minutes in each session, keeping your intensity in the comfort zone; that is, you should be able to carry on a conversation with a training partner. Follow each session with a 5-10 minute cool down. Remember that your warm up and cool down are in addition to your aerobic activity.

There are other ways to improve aerobic fitness and avoid boredom. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) is popular for several reasons, but the main one is that it takes less time. It involves doing very intense exercise for a short duration with low intensity recovery periods. An example would be cycling or running very hard for 30 seconds followed by 2-3 minutes of slow recovery using the same activity. Repeat this 4-6 times, and that is the program.

Strength: It is important to increase upper body strength and endurance in preparation for the paddling phase of training. Resistance training (weight lifting) is an essential part of training and will make paddling more enjoyable. Exercises are directed at improving strength and endurance in specific muscle groups, and the training can be done with free weights, weight machines, resistance bands/tubing and your own body weight (push ups, chin-ups, sit-ups etc). Strength programs can be done at home if a gym facility is not available.

The muscle groups that should be developed are:

- Arms: bicep curls/tricep extensions
- Chest wall: horizontal or bench press
- Upper back and shoulders: lat pull, seated row, rotator cuff exercises
- Lower back: lumbar extension, dead lifts
- Core- abdominals/pelvic floor: plank, side-plank, bridges, crunches, bird-dog
- Legs: leg press/hamstring curls, squats (legs are not a high priority for dragon boat paddling but are included as they are important for general fitness)



Do 3 strength workouts per week, separated by at least one day. You can do aerobic activities on the same day as strength training.

Do 2 sets of 8-12 repetitions of each exercise. Start with a light weight or low resistance with bands, and do 2 sets of 8 reps. When that is easy, increase to 2 sets of 10 reps; when you can do 2 sets of 12 reps comfortably, increase the resistance and go back to 2 sets of 8 reps. Vary the thickness or strength of the tubing to achieve the same result. There is no minimum or maximum weight, as this will vary depending on the muscle group and each individual. Musculoskeletal injury results when too much resistance is applied, when the increase in resistance is made too quickly, and when the normal range of motion is exceeded. It is important *not to hold your breath* as you do the exercise, as this can result in an increase in blood pressure. Exhale as you contract the muscle group. Success is a slow, steady improvement in strength and conditioning. Common sense is an important commodity.

As with aerobic fitness, there are many ways of improving strength and power. The variables that you have to work with are Volume (number of sets and reps), Intensity (the weight or resistance applied) and the Rest time between exercises. If you are interested in big muscles (hypertrophy), then higher volume and lower intensity is the recipe. To build muscle strength the reverse is true (higher resistance, less volume). Most training programs include both features.

Flexibility/balance: The paddling stroke is unique and requires rotation/flexion and extension in several planes. Flexibility training is recommended, and balance drills are always good value for fall prevention (not related to dragon boat) as we age. Stretches should be held for 15-30 seconds and repeated 2-4 times. Yoga is an excellent activity and can play an important role in improving fitness.

Mental training: In competitive sport, mental training plays an important role in race planning, focusing on performance in the boat, relaxation and dealing with the stress of competition.

Resources

I will attach some of the exercises/stretchers from the *Abreast In A Boat Manual*, but the internet can provide much more detail on how to perform these activities. You can google the muscle groups or the specific exercise. There is also lots of material on mental training.

A particularly good website that I use and recommend to patients/athletes is:

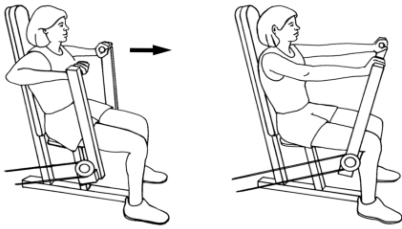
<https://www.fitnessblender.com/>

Go to Workout, Workout Videos and then 'Filters'. Chose Difficulty/Body Focus/Training Type/Equipment and there will be a video program that leads you through the exercise. It's free and covers all of the variables that have been presented in this section. They are good because they don't use a lot of exercise equipment. The core workouts using pilates are especially useful.

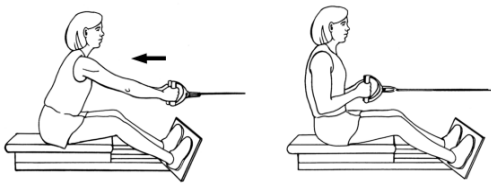
Exercises and Stretches (from AIAB Manual)

It is important to do these exercises safely and correctly. Proper instruction and supervision are essential. Don't forget to breathe! Try to work out with a teammate; it's more fun and helps with compliance.

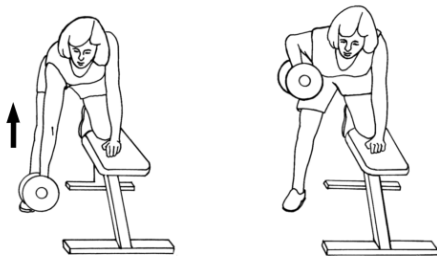
Exercises



Horizontal Press

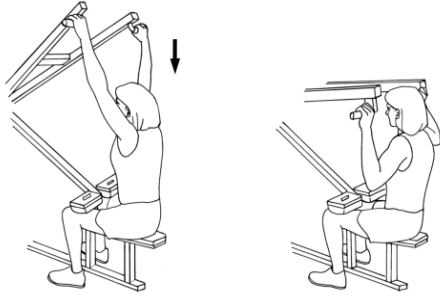


Seated Row

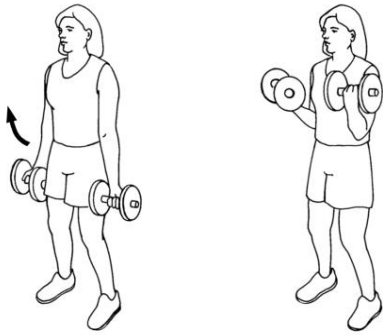


One-arm bent over rowing

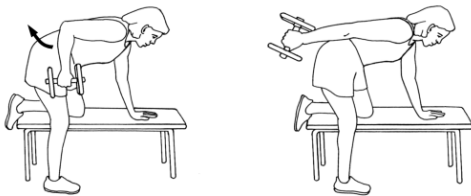
HOW TO START A BREAST CANCER DRAGON BOAT TEAM



Lat Pull



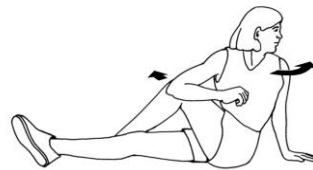
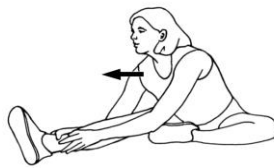
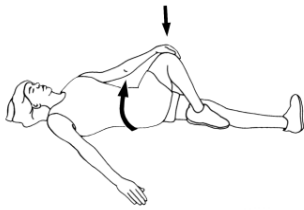
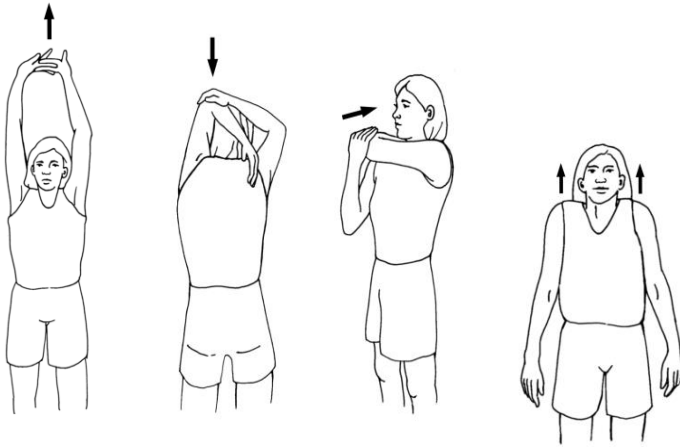
Bicep Curl



Tricep extension

HOW TO START A BREAST CANCER DRAGON BOAT TEAM

Stretches



Donald C. McKenzie, MD, PhD



Safety

Safety Starts on Land

Before each practice, the steersperson and coaches must check:

- weather conditions to avoid high wind, electrical storms, heavy rain, low visibility, etc.
- water conditions to avoid strong currents, waves
- water traffic

Before leaving for the practice:

- identify the club or person responsible on land at the practice location and inform them of your return time to the dock
- schedule the paddle duration, making sure that there is enough natural light to return back to the dock safely
- If paddling between sunset and sunrise use navigation wrist lights on top hands of paddlers: red lights for paddlers on the left and green for those on the right. White light must be used at the front and back.
- avoid night paddling if possible

Available tools: , , , www.windy.com

If the conditions are not acceptable, the practice needs to be cancelled or postponed.

Safety Equipment

Each member on the boat must wear an approved lifejacket. The lifejacket must:

- fit properly corresponding to the paddler's body size
- fit snugly to the body
- be zipped and clipped
- have a whistle that is easily accessible
- be worn on the approach to the dock, on the dock and in the boat

The following equipment must be on board:

- an extra approved lifejacket
- a first aid kit
- two bailers to manually remove water that may enter the boat (one for the front and one for the back). Homemade bailers are acceptable.
- an easily-accessible throw bag (rescue device with a rope adequately stuffed inside that can be thrown to someone needing help on the water)
- an extra buoyant rope (the rope/line needs to be able to float)
- a VHF or a phone in case of emergency
- flares
- an air horn
- emergency contact information for each person on the boat
- A dry bag is useful to protect safety equipment like the VHF, phone, the first aid kit, the emergency contact information pages, and air horn from the water.

HOW TO START A BREAST CANCER DRAGON BOAT TEAM



Dry bag and safety articles



Throw bag



Flares



First Aid Kit



Bailer

Safety Equipment

Other Safety Considerations

- Ideally at least one person on the boat must have cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification (CPR) or experience.
- Coach/drummer and steersperson must be competent at calling commands to control and halt the boat.
- If the coach/drummer or steersperson falls overboard, it will be up to a previously-designated person to take charge of the boat.
- If no drummer/coach is on board, the paddlers seated in the last seats will check that the steersperson has not fallen off the boat.



- Wear protective clothing appropriate for the weather conditions and make sure the fit allows for easy paddling motion.
- Keep the body dry and insulated against heat loss in cold weather conditions.
- Use sun block with a high sun protection factor (SPF).
- Drink plenty of water before and during the practice especially in hot weather.
- Address any symptoms of heat stress immediately.

Safety Protocol

Before boarding the boat:

- check that safety equipment is on board
- check that the boat and oar are in good condition

The safety protocol is performed at each practice. It requires the crew to line up in the assigned seating positions for the practice and to pay full attention to instructions. The safety person will lead the safety protocol as follows:

- Have seatmates check lifejackets are put on properly. Similarly, coach and steer.
- Check lifejackets are snug to the body
- Check lifejackets are zipped and clipped. If the lifejackets do not have zippers, it is important that they are clipped.
- Identify who does not swim
- Assign a paddler to be responsible for the throw bag
- Assign the pointers, left and right. These are the people involved in rescue events, pointing to the person in the water.
- Have each person in the boat count off, starting with the coach/drummer and ending with the steersperson. Remember the total number of crew on the boat.
- Have each row count off. Each paddler will remember her row number.

Onboard Safety

Safety on board requires:

- checking the boat balance (coaches and steersperson)
- counting the heads on board
- paying attention
- keeping focused in the boat
- listening and responding to the coach/steersperson instructions
- not chatting unless the boat is stopped
- changing seats one at a time by staying in a low position while all other paddlers hold the boat steady and brace it
- responding immediately to commands

In Case of Emergency – Boat Flipping or Submerging

Crewmates:

- Stay calm.
- Grab onto the boat.
- Use your legs to check if somebody is under the boat.
- Listen for a knocking sound coming from the hull indicating that someone is trapped under there.



- A person trapped under the boat must knock on the hull to alert crew mates of their location.
- Check your seatmate.
- Count heads
- Call for SOS.
- Count heads again when back on land.
- Check for injuries.

Loading and Unloading

The coaches will lead the loading and unloading. The loading/unloading must be done carefully and calmly.

The loading and unloading at a dock is done with the boat loosely tied to the dock cleats and the fenders set up to avoid damage to the hull by the dock.

- Loading
 - Loop the boat line around the dock cleat; this allows the boat to balance while loading. Do not tie it to the dock.
 - Keep the fenders in set up position.
 - The first to board is the steersperson.
 - Then board from the middle of the boat starting with seat 1 and then 10, then seat 2 and then 9 until the boat is loaded.
 - Wait until the left and right on each row are settled in their seats before inviting a new row to board.
 - Stay low when moving on the boat. Avoid a full standing position.
- Unloading
 - Before unloading, set up the fenders.
 - Loosely tie up the boat to the dock cleat.
 - Unloading is done from the middle of the boat by reversing the loading process.
 - Tie the boat securely to the dock once the crew has disembarked.

Emergency contact information for each crew member

Emergency contact information for each crew member must be on board.

- It shows pre-existing conditions (allergies, diabetes or other concerns).
- It provides immediate access to contact a family member or doctor.
- It can be made available to an ambulance attendant.
- Keep all the pages dry and free from water damage.
- All the information can be summarized on a table for easier access.
- Update information at the beginning of the season or any time it changes.
- Information must be kept private and confidential.

HOW TO START A BREAST CANCER DRAGON BOAT TEAM



Name:		Surname:	
Birth Date:		Health Care Card #:	
Covid-19 Vaccination Status:		Swimmer/Non-swimmer:	
IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY PLEASE CONTACT:			
Name:		Phone:	
Name:		Phone:	
Doctor's Name:		Doctor's Phone:	
Medical Information:			
Medication taken on board:			

An example of Emergency Contact Information Page

Commands

Commands must be known by everyone on the boat. All paddlers must respond promptly to the commands.

For new teams and novices, it is important to practice the commands on land before loading, and on the boat before leaving the dock.

It is important to respond to the commands quickly and efficiently. There should be no talking so that the steersperson can be given full attention and commands be clearly heard.



The steersperson will use the following commands to control the boat:

“Paddles Up”– Assume the ready-to-paddle position. A-Frame. For most teams, this means leaning forward, twisting at the hip, the bottom arm (hand near the blade of the paddle) extended, the blade poised just over the water. When it is time to paddle, pull the paddle to you and sit up, and repeat.

“Back Paddle” – Paddles up in the start position then together turn back over your outside shoulder with your paddle blade just above the water. On the command “Go” put your blade in the water and rotate forward, pushing water toward the front of the boat. The boat will move backward. The sequence will be “Back Paddle. Ready. Go!” Always look forward to keep in synch with the paddler in front of you.

“Let it Ride/Run” – Stop paddling and remove your paddle from the water, letting the boat glide. This is a very popular command at the end of the race. Wait to hear this command.

“Take it Away” – Start paddling when you hear “Go!” A typical sequence is “Paddles up. Take it Away” or “Paddles up. Go!”.

“Hold the Boat” – “Hold water” or “Hold hard” or “Drag your Paddle”. Put the paddle blade in the water to stop the boat. You must respond to this command and the others quickly. “Hold Hard” usually means your crew is not acting fast enough to stop the boat. Insert the blade all the way into the water and push it forward to slow the boat more quickly. Drag your paddle means just that. The boat will gradually slow down.

“Hold for Drift” – Put your paddle in the water deep past the hull, with the blade turned 90 degrees so it faces you. This stops the boat from moving sideways.

“Draw” – This means to twist to the side, place the paddle blade in the water so that it faces you and then draw water underneath the boat, pulling the boat sideways. This is usually used to get the boat to the dock when you are next to it, or it can be used by the first few rows only to correct the angle of the boat. If the command is “Seat one, draw left” then ONLY the paddler on the left side of row one will draw stroke. Do not lean out when using this stroke as you risk capsizing the boat.

“Brace the boat” – Place the blade of the paddle just under the surface of the water and parallel to it (flat). Hold firmly. This makes the boat more stable.

Note that the drummer will be looking straight at the steersperson and can help to relay commands to be sure all paddlers hear them.

The steersperson is in command of the boat and generally gives out the orders. However, the coach/drummer may override the steersperson’s command as they are facing back and may see danger that the steersperson does not.

Adriana Bartoli



Team Success

Definition of a Team

A team is defined as a group of people who collaborate on related tasks toward a common goal.

The Team is composed of breast cancer survivors who are:

- committed to upholding the mission statement; for example, Abreast In A Boat's (AIAB) mission statement is "to raise breast cancer awareness and to demonstrate that women living with breast cancer can lead full and active lives."¹³
- actively take personal responsibility for their own health and fitness both on and off the boat
- one spirit/one team, that is respectful and inclusive
- strong as individuals, but together are invincible
- support collaboration over competition

Roles and Responsibilities

- Everyone is important, no matter their role on the team or their seat in the boat.
- The owners of the team(s) are the team members, the breast cancer survivors.
- All members of the team are expected to volunteer for various team roles and responsibilities.
- It is helpful to have two people share a role.

The team is composed of a captain, manager, steersperson, drummer, coach, and paddlers. These roles may have different names.

Manager

- maintains communication with coach, captain and paddlers
- supports anyone with a special need
- keeps the team roster and attendance at practices
- obtains necessary waiver forms
- looks after logistics for regattas
- ensures boat maintenance and equipment distribution
- could be a supporter/non-paddling member, may take one any of these jobs
- could use tools to assist with management might include Excel, Doodle, TeamSnap

Team Liaison/Captain

- is a breast cancer survivor
- is a leader and spokesperson for the team
- communicates collaboratively with the team
- fosters a healthy attitude among the team members
- can be selected through election, appointment or volunteering

13- Abreast In a Boat Society (Canada), *Team Manual* (Vancouver, BC, 2019), 6.



Drummer

- is a breast cancer survivor
- calls the race, keeping the paddlers focused and calm
- develops a strategy with the coaches depending on the race
- is aware of the status of the paddlers
- has a positive spirit that supports and encourages the team
- is aware of the situation on the race course
- calls the race in a confident enthusiastic voice
- has the ability to be calm under pressure
- is sometimes the coach or a skilled person trained for the role

Paddlers

- only criterion for being a paddler on a team is a diagnosis of breast cancer
- not subject to any criterion related to age, athletic ability, previous paddling experience, body physique and size
- are encouraged to sit in any seat in the boat
- are all part of one team We are all in the same boat.

Steersperson

- is a breast cancer survivor.
- requires special training and has passed a steering accreditation test
- assumes the responsibility for the boat at all times
- requires core strength and some upper body strength

Coach

- is a breast cancer survivor.
- recognizes special issues that accompany the team.
- training program is fundamental to success
- It is an art for the coach to provide the right amount of training by being sensitive to individual team members' existing physical conditions so that no overuse injuries are caused.
- must understand the participatory nature of our mission and not be overly focused on being competitive
- Important attributes are to be sensitive, supportive, positive, encouraging and to act as a role model.
- The goal is to have fun while improving fitness.

Safety Person

- reviews safety procedures with team including loading and unloading the boat
- keeps emergency response card for each paddler
- ensures safety equipment is on the boat (bailers, extra paddles, extra life jacket emergency kit, cell phone and whistle in waterproof bag)
- reviews clothing appropriate for weather/water
- Refer to Part 2 for safety considerations



Communications and Organization Tools

- It is imperative that communications and collaboration are encouraged within the team, ensuring all members are included to create and support one team.
- The preferred method to communicate with the team is by email so that everyone receives the same message at the same time. Text or phone can be used for specific issues.
- Paddlers are encouraged to share their breast cancer experience with others in the community. This is to raise awareness and to demonstrate that those who have been diagnosed can lead full and active lives.
- Outreach in the community can be done by contacting support groups, hospitals, healthcare providers, doctors' offices, service clubs and cancer agencies.
- Communication of the team's mission can be done through print, digital media or website.
- It is important for team to support a teammate dealing with a recurrence and/or a challenging health issue related to themselves or their family. This is best done through personal cards and messages.
- Communication must be respectful, positive, polite, and kind to foster an environment of trust and demonstrate good sportsmanship.

Team Manual

- is key for the organization of the team
- will be developed after the team has had some experience
- recognizes that specific rules and guidelines must be addressed by the organizing team
- will contain variation among countries due to duration of the season, required number of practices and requirements for membership.
- includes code of conduct, training guide and criteria for participation in regattas

Managing Novices

- Novices are usually invited to an introductory paddle to familiarize themselves with the sport.
- At the first meeting, novices meet fellow breast cancer paddlers to learn about the sport and to ask questions of experienced paddlers, allowing them to make a more informed decision and commit to the organization.
- Novices must be assured they will be nurtured and supported by all experienced members of the team.
- Adequately trained novices will have priority to paddle in a festival.

Code of Conduct

Focuses on Team and Team Members (AIAB Team Manual) ¹⁴:

- Members share serious responsibility in protecting, promoting, and upholding the good name of the team.
- Members must be aware at all times that their words, actions and attitudes reflect the image of the team.
- It is Important for all members to uphold code of conduct when wearing their uniform.
- Members, when interacting with each other, must uphold the team's commitment to an inclusive respectful environment. This also includes written and oral communication.

14- *Team Manual*, Vancouver: Abreast In A Boat, 2019 [an adaptation from the manual]



- A member of the team shall not seek personal gain, income or profits.
- A process should be created to address and manage members' concerns. It is important this process respects confidentiality and objectivity.
- At a future date when more teams have formed the organization can structure a Society.

Attitudes

As Jane Frost expressed:

- Dig our paddles deep.
- Keep our gaze clear.
- Laugh a lot and out loud.
- Celebrate our lives.
- Mourn our losses.
- Find the cause of this disease.
- And, know we are making a difference.

Discover Traditions, Take Pictures, Keep the Memories

- Treasure team photos and regatta photos.
- Celebrate the end-of-season paddle.
- Celebrate beginning of season at the first team meeting.
- Celebrate birthdays.
- Gather at a pub after practice.
- Invite supporters/non-paddlers to paddle at practices and to attend parties.
- Create a blog, Facebook page and/or website.
- Create a weekly paddle report which is especially valued by paddlers unable to be on the boat.

Commitment

The success of a team is dependent upon committing to the agreed-upon goals of the team:

- respect regular attendance requirements
- commit to year-long fitness program
- adhere to the team's code of conduct
- obtain authorization from a medical professional to paddle
- fulfil responsibilities to teammates
- advocate and promote the team's mission and message
- take responsibility for one's own health
- respect and value individual differences
- wear team t-shirt to all practices
- honour the value of our sponsors

Value Sponsors

- Send thank you notes to sponsors
- Invite sponsors to a fun paddle
- Wear your team shirt with current sponsors' logo on shirt
- Respect the in-kind equipment donated
- Assist any events with sponsors



- Plan to connect with a sponsor's representative who may attend a paddling or community event

Ten Tips for Team Success

1. Any seat in the boat is the best seat.
2. Have a sense of humour and have fun.
3. Be kind to yourself and to other paddlers.
4. Foster open and honest communication with a positive attitude.
5. Perfection is not required.
6. Be present. Show up. Be punctual.
7. Contribute to One Spirit/One Team.
8. Be engaged. Be willing to participate and to volunteer.
9. Show commitment.
10. Have two steers if possible.

Challenges and Solutions

- Roles are not improvised, but are clearly defined. Everyone is involved in taking on a role. This allows the team to run smoothly. Encourage team members to change roles every season.
- A team is like an orchestra. Each person does their part, each instrument plays its music, and together they play a beautiful song.
- All paddlers should be allowed an equal voice. Mutual respect is paramount.
- Never forget the mission and purpose of the team and/or its organization structure.
- Focus on individual fitness and health. Dragon boating is a strenuous activity and without ongoing regular fitness, paddlers can incur injuries.
- Safety in the boat cannot be compromised and must be adhered to; practising the safety procedures regularly is important.
- Encourage all paddlers to be comfortable paddling anywhere in the boat. All seats in the boat are important.
- Foster respectful and kind communication at all times, even when there is conflict.
- Establish reasonable practice commitment guidelines prior to getting on the water and communicate these to all paddlers so that there are no surprises or any unfair treatment.
- Breast cancer paddlers have physical challenges and strive to be fit. However, it must be recognized that individual members may have physical limitations resulting in a varied range of abilities on the boat.
- Racing can be challenging and fun, with each member of the team playing an important role in getting the boat across the finish line. This is our race against breast cancer.

Joanna Hutton, Karen Carlberg



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