

Cancer consortium takes MGH nurses to Middle East

—by Mandi Coakley, RN, staff specialist

Two MGH nurses, staff specialist, Mandi Coakley, RN, and clinical nurse specialist, Anne-Marie Barron, RN, had an opportunity to travel to Larnaca, Cyprus, May 8–10, 2009, to attend the fifth annual conference of the Middle East Cancer Consortium

(MECC). The conference brings together healthcare professionals from Israel, the Palestinian territories, Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt to explore ways to ease suffering among cancer patients in the region. Created in 1996 under the Clinton administration, MECC, supported by the National Cancer Institute, meets annually on neutral ground to share best practices across borders in the hopes of improving the care of cancer patients.

The focus of this year's conference, "Psycho-oncology: alleviating fear, frustration and sense of loss through non-pharmacological treatment modalities,"

fell right into Coakley and Barron's area of expertise. They presented their work on integrating Therapeutic Touch into nursing practice on Ellison 14 and Ellison 11 and shared an overview of research being conducted at MGH. Coakley and Barron have taught many nurses how to provide Therapeutic Touch and authored the article, "Promoting the Integration of Therapeutic Touch in Nursing Practice on an Inpatient Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant Unit," along with Ellen Fitzgerald, RN, and Ellen Mahoney, RN, that was published in the *International Journal for Human Caring* in 2008.

Conference participants had an opportunity to experience and provide Therapeutic Touch to one another. Says Coakley, "There was an openness and receptiveness among attendees that Therapeutic Touch could provide comfort at the end of life. Participants enthusiastically embraced Therapeutic Touch as an intervention that could alleviate suffering for their patients. They were very anxious to try it."

Attendees from Middle Eastern countries shared stories about the state of oncology and palliative care in their countries and described the challenges they face. They described a lack of human and medical resources, which makes caring for patients at the end of life especially challenging.

For more information, contact Mandi Coakley, RN, at 6-5334.

Staff specialist, Mandi Coakley, RN (4th from left; back row), and clinical nurse specialist, Anne-Marie Barron, RN (4th from left; front row), with attendees of the Middle East Cancer Consortium



(Photo provided by staff)