

Are you a Fibro Groupie?



Different yet the same. We are all individually distinct as snowflakes and yet willing to stick together in a storm. So it is with any group, preserving the uniqueness of each member and sharing the common elements. **Virtual or face to face, the collective information teaches, guides, bonds and supports.** What each adds or takes away is unique, too. And the group sum is always greater than the one, even when that one is the leader.

by Margy Squires

When I look back on my leader days with David in Scottsdale in the early '90s, support groups were the only means of gleaned "fibro" information. We were the odd couple since David was the one with fibromyalgia (FMS) when the majority diagnosed were women. We met many wonderful people in our conference travels, gathering knowledge only people with FMS could give. Pain. Frustration. Therapies. Doctors. Families, understanding or not. Two steps forward, one step back. Today the internet and a plethora of FMS books seem to have replaced medical gatherings but not the personality of support groups, nor dedication of those who lead them.

Kathleen (Kat) Foote of Santa Barbara feels her nursing background lends itself to her leadership skills, organization and keeping her group positive. Kat likes to know why a member comes and how to help them get what they came for. "I find there are two reasons people attend," Kat says, "those looking for information and those wanting to socialize." She is quick to add, "We're a group of friends with fibro that get together rather than a group of fibro patients." She keeps the atmosphere personal by member introductions and sometimes breaks into small discussion groups. The format varies and often includes a main topic from sources such as the *Fibromyalgia Network* and *Health Points* newsletters. Members who've "been through it" can shorten the learning curve for newbies. Kat extends her reach by offering a Yahoo chat room to respond to questions from the group and virtual members. She also tries to incorporate the physical, medical and spiritual aspects in meetings as she feels they're interconnected. Kat's group began in a small coffee shop and now meets at a medical clinic library.

"Being social, sharing information and hope helps lighten the FMS load."
~Donna M.



Third year leader Donna Marsh started her group when the doctor who diagnosed her suggested the best thing she could do was talk to others with FMS. He just didn't know who. She posted an ad and flyers asking if "anyone in Nashville had fibro" to show up and people did. The group meets monthly at a local restaurant that "takes care of our physical comforts well as they know we're different", Donna says. She finds people in pain often isolate themselves and acknowledges that "the group does more for me than a doctor or medication." Donna adds being social, sharing information and hope helps lighten the FMS load. Even when she physically doesn't feel like going, she's better after if she does. Donna encourages family and friends to join meetings. She likes to have a main topic, sometimes what is new for fibro, like vitamin D and pain, and occasionally has a speaker. Some members are "regulars", some "move on" and others are only online. Donna describes her group as upbeat and able to "laugh despite the problems". When asked how long she might continue, Donna replies, "As long as there is a need."

I asked leaders from two other support groups to share their stories. Are you a fibro-groupie? You may want to be! Three organizations which can help you find groups in your state are the Fibromyalgia Network (www.fmnetnews.com or 800-853-2929), National Fibromyalgia Partnership (www.fmpartnership.org) and National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association (www.fmc paware.org). Some have packets available for the asking. Your local Arthritis Foundation may provide group assistance so check with them as well.

©TyH Publications (M. Squires)

