



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

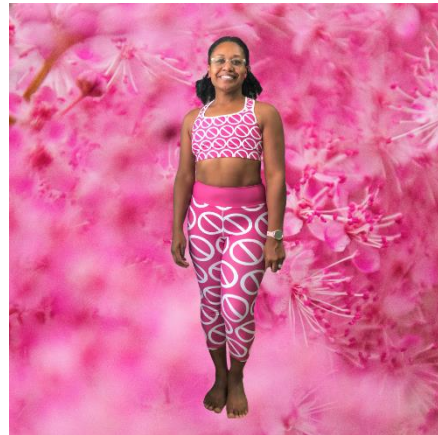
**EMPLOYEE HEALTH  
& WELLBEING**

## Wellbeing Stories | 2020

Alvita D. Kelly, MS, MEd

I was obsessed with doing my breast self-exams. I would do them daily vs monthly. When I found a weird, hard spot in the left breast in July 2016, I literally got out of the shower and asked my husband to feel it. It was definitely something I'd never felt before, but I let it go for about a month or so thinking it was related to the underwire in my bras. However, it stayed in my mind like, "this doesn't feel right." In September, to ease my mind, I went to my OBGYN and he was adamant that "there's nothing to worry about, African-Americans have lumpy breasts." He was hesitant to order additional testing, but to appease me, he went ahead and ordered a couple of tests (mammogram and ultrasound). I'm so thankful that he reluctantly did so! I was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer in October of that year. I've been advocating even more and informing women (especially women of color) to request additional testing rather than solely relying on the "African-American/women of color have lumpy breasts." If I'd not had the additional testing, there's no telling if I'd be here today to share my experience. In November 2016, I had a bilateral mastectomy at the age of 37 (no family history of breast cancer) followed by radiation for five days a week for six weeks and a 10-year medication

Prior to the mastectomy date, I'd opted for reconstruction, but after some initial complications with the breast expanders, I sat and wrote a list of pros and cons of going through the reconstruction process; I had 11 cons and my only pro was I'd have breasts with 3-D tattoos. I have to admit, I was excited for the 3-D tattoo process that would follow; however, I felt I would still not be happy with my "new" body. Therefore, from a mental health and self-esteem standpoint, I had to begin accepting my body in its new state, flat-chest and scarred. Yoga, meditation, prayer, and having a strong support system have been my saving grace. If you take nothing else from this, at least take his message, we know our bodies better than anyone; don't let anyone make you feel as if you're a hypochondriac or overreacting. I'm blessed to still be here with my son, husband, family, friends, and colleagues in UD DIEEC/DE Stars.



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