



Cancer Connections Online Monthly Forum 2007 Archive Presentation

March 2007: Navigating the Cancer System, facilitated by Debbie Jeppeson, Patient Navigator, Sletten Cancer Institute, Great Falls

YOU DO WHAT?

In the late 1980's, Dr. Freeman, president of the American Cancer Society, noted in his practice a huge difference in the survival rates of poor Americans who had cancer compared to those more fortunate. As a result, he spent many years studying the reasons for these differences. What Dr. Freeman found out was that poverty, culture, and bias due to age or race made a significant difference in who sought health care and how they were treated once they entered the health care system. Dr. Freeman founded the first navigation programs in New York City. These programs had a huge impact on the health care received by those who were disadvantaged.

“Many people struggle with our health care system at a time when they are fighting for their lives.” This quote came from a report “Voices of a Broken System” which was submitted to Congress and led President George W. Bush to sign into law the Patient Navigator, Outreach, and Chronic Disease Prevention Act in 2005. Since that time, navigation programs are developing over the entire country to help people access and receive quality health care. The issues surrounding cancer care are more complex than many other health problems as cancer involves many specialties—general practitioners, surgeons, radiation physicians, chemotherapy physicians, and others. It is difficult and confusing to try to get to all the places one needs to be and know why one is there. My name is Debbie Jeppesen. I graduated from nursing school in 1985 and have spent 15 years working in ER's and ICU's. About six years ago, I had the opportunity to work in oncology (the study of cancer) and now can't imagine doing anything else. I spent five years as a chemotherapy nurse in a physician office and now work in Great Falls as a Patient Navigator.

So, what exactly is a Patient Navigator? In a few words, I see my role as trying to smooth out the bumps in the road of cancer care so **everyone** can receive the treatment they want and that is best for them. I have three main goals:

Save lives from cancer—I want to make sure that people with an abnormal finding have the follow-up needed to make a diagnosis and begin treatment if needed or desired.

Eliminate barriers to care—I want to make sure patients make it to their appointments and understand why they are there. Also, I need to let people know what other services are available that may be helpful during this time and in the future.



Ensure people don't have to wait for care—I want patients to get through the health care system as easily and smoothly as possible without long waits. Delays in treatment are associated with lower survival rates.

How do I do this? Sometimes patients are referred to me by physicians and sometimes patients call or come to my office. I like to spend quite a bit of time finding out about them so I can discover their needs and concerns, as well as anticipate future problems before they occur. Frequently, what doesn't seem like a problem today may become a problem weeks down the road. It is important that each situation be worked out for the best of that patient. Two patients with the same problem may have two different solutions depending on their personal circumstances.

A lot of what I do relates to financial issues surrounding cancer treatments. Our financial consultant, the patient, family, and myself will work on ways to get monetary assistance for the care needed. What is frightening to me, is that 75% of all bankruptcies are due to medical obligations! Yikes!

Another thing I spend quite a bit of time doing is coordinating appointments for people, especially those who live out of town. Ideally, appointments with various doctors and/or tests can be made for the same day or two consecutive days to limit the amount of time patients must spend on the road. Probably what I enjoy the most is providing education. I teach classes about cancer, cancer care, and help with many of the support groups active in our area. Basically, if there is something keeping a patient from seeking or getting the care needed, I try to help find a way around that problem. Often this may be fear, transportation, housing, food, child care, or even pet and yard care. These things are called barriers, and I will talk more about them later in the week. There is no charge for using a navigator. The service is provided for the benefit of patients and the health care team too. Coordinating the necessary tests, procedures, appointments, and treatments; providing education; and assisting with overcoming barriers helps everyone involved and can greatly reduce stress at a time when most people are already overwhelmed. Over the next week, I want to talk about barriers and some solutions that may be helpful. One day I will discuss financial options, where to look for help and how to get applications. Resources that are available will be another topic and we will finish the week talking about survivorship—how do you get your life back once you have been diagnosed with cancer.

What are barriers and what can we do about them?

Receiving the diagnosis of cancer can be devastating. Trying to get through the healthcare system can be extremely frustrating and stressful at a time when you are already stressed. Navigators can help you, your family and your healthcare providers maneuver through the complexity of cancer care smoothly. What exactly is a barrier? A



barrier is anything that stands in the way of a patient and the medical care needed. This can be anything from fear to religious beliefs to financial issues to child care to a lack of understanding about what is happening. Almost all barriers can be addressed. When solutions are found, anxiety is less, care progresses more smoothly, and patients are more satisfied—which is the way health care should be. Following is a collection of the most common barriers that I have encountered. The possibilities for barriers are almost limitless so in the interest of time, I will discuss a few. Some of these things you may have had to deal with yourself. If there are issues in this list that pertain to you, please discuss them with your health care provider or try some of the suggestions mentioned. You are certainly free to contact me as well and we can take a more in-depth look into the issues.

Transportation

Residents of Montana are very familiar with the long drives that often accompany the need to access health care. This is especially true when specialty services are needed, such as oncologists and pediatricians and even for getting some procedures or tests done. Not only is fuel a major expense but the time involved can limit access for some people to the care they need. Weather can be a factor limiting travel as well. The American Cancer Society has a program called Road to Recovery that provided transportation for cancer patients to the facilities necessary for treatment. Many portions of the state have drivers that have been screened and approved by the ACS, though not all areas have access to this service. Senior Citizen's Centers will often be able to provide transportation for qualifying individuals. This may take some coordination as they may only transport on certain days. Many smaller towns that have clinics will host visiting physicians once or twice a month. This allows the patient to see the specialist and stay close to home.

Some towns provide transportation services for medical appointments. Criteria to qualify for assistance varies. Generally, these programs require an easy, free enrollment and then 24 hour notice prior to appointments. There are medical specialties not offered in Montana that necessitate travel to another region. Again, the American Cancer Society can help arrange transportation, which will frequently be flights offered by qualified pilots who volunteer their time and aircraft. These arrangements require physician approval and are best made through your physician's office. Sometimes these are even between towns too far apart in the same state or if the condition of the patient warrants air transportation. Many communities have programs that will offer fuel vouchers to qualifying individuals to assist with the costs of gasoline used in getting to/from medical appointments.



Housing

We are fortunate in Great Falls to have the Gift of Life housing for cancer patients. There are over twenty units to accommodate the patient and one family member while staying in Great Falls for cancer treatment. Sometimes, patients live there for several months while completing radiation and/or chemotherapy. Frequently, motels located near medical facilities will offer discounted rates to those staying there because of medical appointments. These rates can be 30 – 50% off regular room rates. Having a motel that offers a continental breakfast is an added plus. Bigger cities in Montana may have a Ronald McDonald House or a church-sponsored house where patients and families can reside while having medical treatments. These may be free of charge or a donation may be requested. Generally, these facilities will have separate bedroom quarters but a communal kitchen where guests prepare their own meals. Usually these houses will be within easy walking distance of the medical facility. National service groups such as St. Vincent DePaul and the Salvation Army may provide free or reduced accommodations for a short period of time. Another place to check for housing possibilities are local community assistance services. For example, again in Great Falls, we have Opportunities, Inc., that will frequently be able to help with shelter arrangements.

Financial

This is an entire topic of its own so I will reserve this for discussion tomorrow.

Fear

Whether personal experience, religious beliefs, or misunderstanding, fear is a huge barrier. Just the mention of the word cancer is enough to cause many people to shut out everything else around them. For some, learning as much as they can about their diagnosis helps them cope with the disease. For others, it is easier to back away or turn and run. Neither of these is right or wrong. How we deal with things is based on our previous experiences. The barrier comes when the lines of communication don't cross and no messages are coming either direction. Patients aren't able to discuss their concerns and may just let their physicians make decisions for them. Sometimes health care providers do not communicate at the patient's level of understanding leaving an already distressed person even more confused and not knowing what to ask. Some people refuse to have the recommended screening tests for early cancer detection (pap smear, colonoscopy, mammogram, etc.) because they don't want to know if they have cancer. While it is easier to treat the disease when it is detected in the early stages, there are those who are too afraid of what the results of the tests may show and what treatment may be necessary. Some people are afraid to share "personal" parts of their lives with physicians. They are modest. They fear being judged on their lifestyle. Trust in a higher power is not uncommon. Many believe things will happen as they were "meant" to happen and nothing can be done to change that. These people are afraid of "messing with fate".

Fear of modern medicine causes people to look to options in alternative therapy such as herbs. Alternative therapies are not considered wise choices by most physicians. Should these therapies fail and the patient chooses to seek medically proven therapies, these people fear being judged on their prior decisions.

One of the greatest issues surround fear is a previous experience with cancer that had a bad outcome. Whether it was a friend, family member, or even the patient him/herself, those prior experiences are engrained. Education is the best solution to the barrier of fear. Establishing a good relationship with your care provider and being able to openly discuss your concerns and fears will yield great dividends. Seek out those who have been in similar situations or ask your health team to connect you with someone who has gone through or is going through what you are. Look for opportunities to learn more about your disease but ask for reliable sources of information. With the electronic age, there is a wealth of information available but not all of it is credible. I will list some good internet resources at the end of this article. When you go to your appointments, take someone whom you trust with you. Have this person take notes. Frequently, what you hear and remember may be different than what was actually said. This is a natural reaction to stress. Studies have shown that patients frequently only remember 5% of what is said in the physicians' office. Many oncology practices will offer classes related to treatment and its side effects. The oncology nurses taking care of you are excellent resources as well. They will know programs available in your area and can visit with you about your treatment, side effects, etc.

As needed, the nurses can take your concerns/questions to the physician for prompt responses. Support groups are a good way to meet up with others in similar situations. Some people feel uncomfortable in a group but please know, you can just sit and listen. When you become more comfortable, you may want to share. Many support groups are actually quite small, five or fewer participants. These people form lasting relationships and are a great resource for solving problems and de-stressing. The American Cancer Society established the Reach to Recovery program many years ago to put newly diagnosed breast cancer patients in touch with a woman who had the same diagnosis and has already undergone treatment and special training classes. Ask your health care provider for a connection. You may also call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-252-5470 and request a referral.

Education is necessary for you to make the best decisions for the treatment that fits your life. What suits you will not necessarily be the same treatment that someone else with the same diagnosis would choose. You need to know enough to make the decision that you are the most comfortable with. Your healthcare team will be able to guide you through many issues that may come up during the course of treatment. Remember, they are there to help you so don't be afraid or embarrassed to bring up concerns and difficulties you are facing.

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P.O. Box 6446
Bozeman, Montana 59771



Phone: 406-587-8080
Fax: 406-556-1050
www.CancerFamilyNetwork.org

Where to find more information:

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

1-800-227-2345

American Institute for Cancer Research

www.aicr.org

1-800-843-8114

Cancer Care, Inc.

www.cancercare.org

1-800-813-4673

Cancer Hope Network

www.cancerhopenetwork.org/

1-877-467-3638

CancerNet

www.Cancernet.nci.nih.gov

1-800-422-6237

Lance Armstrong Foundation

www.laf.org

1-512-236-8820

National Cancer Institute

www.nci.nih.gov

1-301-435-3848

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

www.nccn.org

1-888-909-6226

Where can I look for financial help?

Any way you look at it, cancer treatment is expensive. First there are the biopsies, CT's and other imaging studies, surgery consults, and pathology consults just to get a diagnosis. Then there may be bone marrow biopsies, more radiology studies and oncology referrals to decide how to treat the cancer. Then, there is the treatment. It is overwhelming! Fortunately, there are ways to get help with cancer treatment. Many national foundations and organizations offer assistance for those who fit their eligibility



criteria. These programs are very helpful and may also direct you to other sources of financial assistance that you may qualify for. Some programs will look at all assets, such as vehicles, property, or investments, while some will only consider income. Some will want to know if you have insurance, or enough insurance. Having insurance doesn't mean you wouldn't qualify for assistance, so it is always good to apply anyway. Just meeting the co-pays for some insurance plans causes great financial difficulty. Some people will qualify for Medicare and/or Medicaid but have never applied for these federal or state programs. The application can be done on-line but can be quite daunting. Talk with your local Medicare/Medicaid office about qualifications and assistance with the forms. Lets talk a little about what generally qualifies a person for assistance and then I will give you some resources to look to for help. Most patient assistance programs base their financial criteria on the federal poverty guidelines. For 2007, in Montana, these are the values:

Family size Income

- 1 \$ 10,210
- 2 \$ 13,690
- 3 \$ 17,170
- 4 \$ 20,650
- 5 \$ 24,130
- each add'l \$ 3,480

Assistance programs will then take two to four times the poverty level as the basis for providing funding. So, for a family of two, financial assistance may be available for an income of \$26,400 to \$52,800. Each institution varies somewhat in their criteria. Sometimes healthcare facilities, like hospitals, will offer discounts on the services provided based on the poverty guidelines. Pharmaceutical companies typically have assistance programs with similar guidelines. These programs will provide the drug at no charge or replace drug already given for applicants that meet eligibility. There are also many organizations that offer a membership card that enables the cardholder to discounts at pharmacies for some medications. These are particularly helpful for those who take many medications to control other illnesses than just cancer, such as high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, diabetes, high cholesterol, or depression. In selecting cancer treatment, also consider clinical trials. Often, drugs that will become the new standards of therapy will only be offered on clinical trials and will be provided free of charge. This enables you to receive the newest treatment without incurring the cost. It is important to discuss clinical trials with your oncologist. For those who have insurance and/or investments, obtaining financial assistance from an outside program may be difficult. Sometimes you will be expected to liquidate your investments to pay for your cancer treatment or sell off property holdings other than your home. Obtaining a personal loan may be an option instead of selling or cashing holdings. If you have a life

insurance policy, you may be able to sell it for near face value. Some companies will allow you to divide the life insurance into pieces to cash if needed rather than cash the entire policy at once. Following is a listing of many organizations that offer assistance programs for people undergoing cancer treatment. Some will have access via a website, others will require a nurse or physician to complete. If you have questions, please talk with your physician's office to find out who can help you get the necessary applications and the information needed to complete them. Many will require proof of income so be prepared to supply copies of tax returns, disability checks, etc. For assistance with specific cancer treatment drugs, visit with your oncology nurse as the manufacturers vary.

[American Cancer Society](#)

www.cancer.org

1-800-252-5470

may help with needs related to cancer treatment (wigs, prosthesis)

[AVONCares](#)

www.cancercare.org

1-800-813-4673

financial assistance to low-income, under and uninsured women related to treatment of breast and cervical cancers

[Cancer Care](#)

www.cancercare.org

1-800-813-4673

support, information, financial assistance for cancer patients

[Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation](#)

www.candlelighters.org

1-800-366-2223

emergency funding and transportation

[Fertile Hope](#)

www.fertilehope.org

1-888-994-4673

discounted sperm banking, egg freezing, and embryo freezing to newly diagnosed cancer patients wishing to preserve fertility

[Free Medicine Foundation](#)

www.FreeMedicine.com

1-573-996-3333

provides some prescription meds for \$5 per medication

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Phone: 406-587-8080
Fax: 406-556-1050
www.CancerFamilyNetwork.org

HealthWell Foundation

www.info@healthwellfoundation.org

1-800-675-8416

financial assistance with co-pays, premiums, and out-of-pocket expenses for cancer patients

Medicare

www.medicare.gov

1-800-633-4227

National Organization for Rare Disorders

www.rarediseases.org

1-888-744-2581

assistance for some types of uncommon cancers

Partnership for Prescription Assistance

www.pparx.org/Intro.php

1-888-477-2669

helps patients find programs to provide medications for reduced rates or free

Patient Advocate Foundation

www.copays.org

1-866-512-3861

helps with copay assistance as well as insurance and other financial issues, job discrimination, and debt crisis matters

Patient Access Network Foundation

www.patientaccessnetwork.org

1-866-316-7263

assists insured patients with out-of-pocket costs associated with cancer treatment

Patient Services Incorporated

www.uneedpsi.org

1-800-366-7741

assistance available for CML, bone metastases, Hep C, gastrointestinal tumors, hemophilia

Rx Outreach

1-800-769-3880

some medications offered for \$20-\$30 for 90 day supply

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Phone: 406-587-8080
Fax: 406-556-1050
www.CancerFamilyNetwork.org

[Sun Association Card](#)

1-866-662-1351

discount prescription card

[The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society](#)

www.lls.org

1-800-955-4572

helps reimburse some medications, transportation and procedures

[Together Rx](#)

www.Together-Rx.com

1-800-865-7211

discount prescription card

[Wal-Mart](#)

check at location near you

offers some generic prescriptions for \$4 per month

[Women Against Breast Cancer](#)

P.O. Box 1945

Great Falls, MT 59403

a Montana project to help with expenses related to breast cancer

such as wigs, prosthesis, travel for second opinion, meds to help with chemo side effects, and tamoxifen

[But I Don't Know How to Ask for Help!](#)

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is frightening. Many people find themselves trying to make decisions that will affect the rest of their lives at a time when they are the most stressed and least prepared to make those decisions. There are many challenges with cancer other than the disease itself. How you cope with those challenges depends greatly on how you have coped with crises in the past and where you are in your life at the present time. Are you dealing with job changes? Children? Are there issues with partners or friends? Your personality, priorities, and outlook on life will shape the way you face the cancer. The key to coping with all of these issues is to understand and be able to express your needs to your support team. Who is your support team? For most, the team will include some of the following:

- Family members
- Friends and neighbors
- Clergy and members of your religious community
- Health care team—including mental health counselors
- Coworkers
- Other cancer survivors

- National support organizations
- Local service agencies
- Support groups
- Online forums
- Cancer telephone support hotlines

That opens a lot of possibilities for support but how do you talk with people and let them know what you need? People are generally comfortable turning to their family and friends for assistance but these people may not be able to provide all the information you are seeking. Often, these people also need help to cope with your cancer. It is important for you to be aware of the sources of support available to you and know how to access them.

Figure out what you need:

In knowing how to communicate with others, it is important to know what your needs are. When first diagnosed, people are often overwhelmed with the decisions to be made. Make a list of what you think you will need to ease the tension during this time. These are things your family and friends can help you with. Examples include:

- Listening while you talk
- Keep you company
- Remind you to be good to yourself
- Run errands
- Go with you to medical appointments
- Screen telephone calls
- Discuss financial, legal, and insurance issues
- Provide financial support
- Discuss what your physicians said about treatment options, side effects, prognosis
- Help you overcome loneliness or depression—may include encouraging you to seek treatment for depression
- Help resolve problems and conflicts

Talking with family

The impact of a cancer diagnosis affects the entire family. Sometimes it is hard to realize how much it affects those closest to you. Relationships become strained. You may want to ‘protect’ them from worry and not share your concerns and feelings. While you cannot help how you feel, you can open the lines of communication to overcome this barrier. Here are some tips:

- Be specific about what is bothering you and expect the same from your loved ones
- Try being tactful when expressing difficult feelings but don’t be afraid to bring up the subject
- Be a good listener
- It’s okay to not feel like talking, but try not to withdraw when someone needs to talk with you

- Try not to take anger and resentment from loved ones personally—likely the cancer is their target, not you
- Reach out to those who don't know what to say or do
- Get outside help from your physician or mental health professional if you need it.

Talking with children

Family discussions about cancer can be very difficult. In particular, you may want to protect your children from what is happening to you. Children are very perceptive though and they need information to deal with their fears, concerns, and misconceptions as well. They need you to talk with them so they can feel free to talk to you. Be candid in your conversations but also speak at the appropriate level for the age of your children.

- Explain how your illness will affect their lives
- Reassure them it is okay to be angry or upset
- Let them know they are loved, always
- Give basic information about your cancer and treatment
- Schedule periodic family meetings—gives them a chance to express their concerns
- Encourage them to talk about what they hear from friends or classmates so you can correct misinformation
- Help them feel comfortable with changes in your physical appearance and activity levels
- Encourage them to talk with a counselor, other family member, friend, support group or hotline

Breaking the news at work

Depending on your personality and need for privacy, you may feel comfortable telling everyone you know about your cancer or you may want to tell only a chosen few. Some don't tell coworkers and complete entire treatment regimes without coworkers knowing. It may be easier to deal with work-related issues if someone you are close to at work knows what you are going through. Again, be honest and help them understand your situation. Here are some guidelines:

- Control your emotions
- Know your rights—there are three federal laws that protect people with cancer against job discrimination:
 - * The Americans with Disabilities Act
 - * The Federal Rehabilitation Act
 - * The Family and Medical Leave Act
- Determine what you want before you speak with your supervisor
- Are there flexible work arrangements—can you compress your hours into fewer days to have a day or two extra for medical care or recovery time, can you job-share, can you work more from home, can someone else assume some of your responsibilities, can you take extra breaks if needed
- Know who you need to talk to about company policies and benefits
- Can other employees donate leave to help cover your time off work

- Can you periodically review the situation with your supervisor
- Ensure your medical information will be kept confidential
- Discuss what you want your supervisor to say to other employees, if anything
- Know your limits—don't overdo
- Educate your boss and coworkers about cancer treatment
- Return from leave only if you are ready to resume your duties

Speaking with your health care team

When talking to your medical team, remember to take the time to understand your options, the physician's recommendations, and sort through them to make the choices that are best for you. Your health care team needs to know what your expectations are also. Some people want to take control and discuss every detail of the disease and treatment while others would rather not seek additional information and follow the physician's advice. Again, there is no right or wrong, it is what you want that is important. When talking with your health care providers, try these:

- Make notes about when you first noticed symptoms along with dates of procedures, lab tests, etc.
- Keep a notebook and take it with you to all appointments
- Learn how to read your pathology report

Great! I'm done with treatment. Now what??

From the time of your first finding of cancer through the completion of treatment, there was probably very little in your life that did not revolve around the disease. There were likely few moments that cancer was not in your thoughts or in the back of your mind in some way. You probably felt that cancer had taken over every aspect of your life. Now, as you near or have completed treatment, your healthcare team wants to give your life back to you. Some cancer patients consider themselves survivors from the first day of diagnosis. Others feel they are survivors once treatment is completed. Whatever your view, you are a survivor.

There are two things commonly feared by those who have faced a diagnosis of cancer. The first is loss of control. It seems in all the confusion of receiving a diagnosis, making decisions regarding treatment and getting through treatment, someone is always telling you what to do, where to go, and when to be there. Many survivors feel they have totally lost control over their life. In some ways though, the support received by those around you, including your healthcare team, envelopes you in a layer of comfort and protection. You probably felt very safe in the physician's offices—you knew you would be taken care of no matter what happened. These were people you grew to trust and rely on. Now that you are done with treatment, this safe haven is gone. Some survivors feel like they have been abandoned or pushed aside. How do you cope? Where can you turn?

The second fear is that of a recurrence—what if the cancer comes back? You probably received a prognosis with your diagnosis and were given some idea of what the future may hold in regards to your cancer. Maybe your scans following treatment are clear as a bell and you have been

given the okay to get on with life and all the things you were doing before your diagnosis. But, how will you feel when the date of your three or six month follow-up approaches? Will you be overcome with the fear of finding cancer again? How can you ever get your life back with these concerns? Please know, your healthcare team has no intention of abandoning you or leaving you out in the cold without shelter. They will always be available whether you have questions or concerns, need to talk, or are looking for resources. You may not see them weekly like you probably were before, but they are still there for you. And, just a phone call away. I can speak from experience—there is little that is more rewarding than seeing a former treatment patient stop in to say hello. Often, those drop-by visits are the sparks that keep hope alive in staff and other patients also. Everyone is delighted to see a survivor. Taking control of your life again is a huge step.

Overcoming fear requires intense emotional work so you can get back to the business of living. You need to be aware of cancer, but don't allow fear of the disease to dictate the way you live. You will find there are events or dates that will trigger apprehension. As mentioned earlier, check-ups and tests can be major triggers. Other things that elicit fear are:

- New aches or pains
- Anniversary dates of diagnosis, surgery, etc.
- Illness of family, friends
- Diagnosis or recurrence of cancer in family, friends
- Holidays, birthdays
- Media coverage of celebrities with cancer
- Publishing of cancer statistics and research updates

With a cancer diagnosis, you probably have come to the realization that you cannot control the future. However, you can control how you react to it and you can control some of the circumstances surrounding your future. Keep a positive attitude. Live one day at a time. Here are some suggestions to help:

- Share fears with those you trust, your support circle. Maybe you want to renew contact with a dear friend with whom you were comfortable but have lost touch.
- Exercise. You don't need to participate in strenuous physical activity but try to do something. Start slowly with your physician's recommendation and gradually increase activity as your stamina and strength build.
- Focus on what is positive in your life. This can be anything: family members, friends, co-workers, your job, your home/yard, pets, etc.
- Take time for yourself. If you feel you need a day to relax and spend time with a good book, do so. Perhaps doing a task like cleaning a closet or finishing a quilt has been in the back of your mind for awhile. Have at it!

- Do things you enjoy. Have you always wanted to learn a new craft or skill? Take a class or workshop. Many communities offer adult education classes. Maybe you want to be more active but don't have the strength to do what you used to, try a low-impact activity, yoga for example. Maybe line-dancing appeals to you—you can start off slowly and work your way up as you are physically able.
- Return to work, or volunteer. Volunteering allows you to set the hours you know you can commit too and maintains social contact too. You will even meet new people and may widen your support circle. Do you prefer to work with animals? Check with an animal shelter to see what volunteer opportunities are available. Perhaps you could walk dogs and get a little exercise yourself as well as benefiting an animal.
- Keep a journal or create artwork to express your feelings. This does not require making a daily entry but does work best if you establish a routine such as three times a week. There is no right or wrong way to journal. Artwork is also a very individual activity, and very therapeutic.
- Practice relaxation and guided imagery. These activities focus on breathing, visualization and channeling energies inward to enhance your sense of well-being. You can do these techniques on your own, take classes, or seek a provider for one-on-one sessions.
- Explore your spirituality. Whether religious or nonreligious, many survivors find faith, hope, and reassurance in prayer and spiritual practices. You can use spirituality for inspiration, coming to terms with losses, identifying strengths, and helping maintain a sense of control over what you are going through.
- Seek professional help if feelings of confusion, anger, sadness or fear persist for long periods of time. Help may be found in counselors, clergy, and/or your physician.
- Make lists of the good things in your life and those you would like to change. Evaluate your entries. Think about strategies to make the undesirable things better. Keep your goals attainable though—take small steps at a time. You will feel much better achieving many small goals than setting a goal too high and never being able to reach it. Making the most of being a survivor requires a bit of balancing—between hope and fear, strength and weakness, and dependence and direction. The trick to keeping your balance is learning to live with the uncertainties and transform your fear into positive energy to bring meaning and strength to your life. One thing that cancer survivors state over and over is that cancer causes a person to focus on their life. Priorities get re-set. Things that were once important now seem trivial. Seek what makes you happy. Take care of yourself. You may have negative thoughts about yourself and situations you are faced with. Acknowledge these thoughts—don't avoid them. Put your feelings in writing. You may realize some of your emotions just don't make sense. You may also be able to pinpoint exactly what the source of the negative thought is and cope with it directly. Do not bury your anger. Eventually, hidden anger turns to sadness and despair. Be honest with yourself and express your concerns to your support circle. By sharing your feelings you may be able to turn your anger into reason and deal with it more effectively. Identify your strengths. Think about how you have handled other tough issues in your life. What gave you strength? Was it humor? Was it friendship? Maybe it was a certain place you liked to visit. If you can't get to that place physically, go there mentally. Gather strength from as

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many areas as you can to boost your coping powers and deal with issues calmly and productively. Healing takes time. You need to recover physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. It may seem like a long, slow process but it is a journey well taken. There will be days that you are simply too tired to consider any activities. That's okay. There are better days ahead. As time goes, you will see more good days and fewer and fewer tough days. Don't get discouraged. Keep moving forward. You are more than your cancer. You are a survivor.