

A New Chapter for the LIFE Program

Breast cancer patient Karen Sussman chose NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) for her cancer journey because of the world-class care she would receive in her local community. After she finished chemotherapy and radiation treatment, she said it was a welcome and unexpected benefit to become part of NorthShore's Living in the Future (LIFE) Cancer Survivorship Program, which helped her transition back to her new life.

Now, she's hoping an educational program being launched at NorthShore aimed at internal medicine and family medicine residents will give emerging health professionals the knowledge they will need to care for cancer survivors – much-needed skills not typically taught in medical school.

"It's so important for primary care doctors to understand our concerns, learn about medications' side effects, and just help coordinate our care after we've completed treatment and transition back to the new normal," said Sussman, a member of the NorthShore Oncology Patient Advisory Board. About to celebrate her five year survivor mark, Sussman is one of 12 million Americans living with cancer, a wonderful milestone that calls on primary caregivers to support and educate their patients in new ways.

Funded by a grant from The Coleman Foundation and designed by Carol A. Rosenberg, MD, FACP, Director and Founder of the LIFE Cancer Survivorship Program, the new survivorship curriculum will be targeted to physicians in training.

Like Sussman, thousands of patients have participated in the model LIFE Program, which has been available free to NorthShore patients since 2006 and funded in part by the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center at NorthShore Highland Park Hospital, Healthcare Foundation of Highland Park and The Lance Armstrong Foundation. The LIFE Program offers customized care plans, educational seminars and resources for living and moving forward with life after cancer.

"As a young doctor, I want to learn what to look for in cancer patients and be more comfortable with coordinating their future care." – Dr. Jennie Kwon

"Once physicians go into practice, they will need to know how to manage persistent problems, optimize health and decrease the risk for late effects of treatment in their cancer survivor patients," said Dr. Rosenberg. The "Introduction to Cancer Survivorship" curriculum for University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine medical students and residents at NorthShore will begin in May.



Dr. Carol A. Rosenberg

Jennie Kwon, DO, the 2012/13 chief resident at NorthShore who shadowed Dr. Rosenberg to learn about the LIFE Program for patients, will help coordinate the program for up-and-coming providers.

"We have a new population of patients and most primary care doctors are not in a position to manage their care because they have not been trained in the specifics of cancer survivorship," said Dr. Kwon. "As a young doctor, I want to learn what to look for in cancer patients and be more comfortable with coordinating their future care."

Dr. Kwon said it wasn't until she sat alongside a patient undergoing radiation for cancer that she started to understand what cancer patients went through on a sometimes daily basis. "This is a great opportunity for residents so they're equipped to know what to watch for in their patients and, ultimately, to prevent poor outcomes for cancer survivors as they age."

"NorthShore's grant request for the new curriculum meshed with our intended impact to support cancer services from diagnosis through end of life," said Rosa Berardi, Program Officer for The Coleman Foundation.

"This curriculum will give healthcare providers the effective tools they need to support cancer survivors while also promoting communication between physicians so that the cancer patient is assisted at every step in their journey," she said. She hopes the new LIFE Program for residents at NorthShore will be disseminated and shared among other healthcare systems.

Dr. Rosenberg said that's exactly the plan. "The Coleman Foundation is making a pioneering move in supporting the curriculum," she added. "We're very grateful for their partnership." ■