

Living in the Future Connects Cancer Survivors

“Care that is by the community, for the community,” is how Carol A. Rosenberg, MD, describes the essence of the unique cancer survivorship program she directs at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare.

The first community cancer survivorship program in the region, Living in the Future (LIFE), is designed specifically with cancer survivorship guidelines from the Institute of Medicine—the program educates, empowers and enlightens cancer survivors and does so using all the latest science for survivorship care.

Implemented in part with a prestigious Community Program grant from the Lance Armstrong Foundation, LIFE provides a bridge from a patient’s oncology treatment environment back to their community, family and life.

The LIFE program at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare recognizes survivorship as a distinct phase of care and offers each patient a customized “prescription” or survivorship care plan in an electronic format, creating a model for the healthcare industry and the estimated 10 million cancer survivors in the United States.

A passionate, high-energy creative director at an advertising agency, Arlene Wanetick was 51 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. “Initially I didn’t really know what I would need, it’s not part of your consumer set to know. I just had to go on instinct, gut and faith,” she said.

Wanetick counts several doctors and nurses at Evanston and Highland Park hospitals among her blessings in her personal breast cancer journey, paying tribute to their compassion, consideration, and connections. From the beginning, she considered herself lucky as her cancer was caught early, and she had great confidence in the care she was receiving.

As she made her way through surgery and radiation, Wanetick wanted as much information as she could get, taking notes at every physician conversation and reading everything that came her way, including an article or two that talked about survivorship.

“When I first read something about a survivorship program my reaction was ‘this is so smart, so progressive,’” Wanetick said. When she learned that the LIFE program was underway at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare, she was thrilled.

“I remember thinking I am so glad I am with this institution. Knowing this program existed made me feel like I was going to get better care, it gave me such confidence in this forward-thinking institution,” Wanetick said. “I just thought ‘they’re on top of it!’”

The LIFE program begins with a personal risk adapted visit with clinical coordinator Carole Martz, RN, MS, who reviews the survivor’s cancer history and treatment and covers medical surveillance guidelines and healthy lifestyle recommendations. Patients are encouraged to ask any and all questions throughout their participation in LIFE.

“She is so passionate, knowledgeable and caring, and she

gave me lots of useful, tangible information. The program is a great resource, providing confidence and peace of mind,” Wanetick said of Martz.

“Working with Carole Martz, and going through the data gave me insight into the things I should be paying attention to. Talking with her and developing that vocabulary helped me with tools I need to develop relationships with my physicians,” said breast cancer survivor and LIFE enthusiast Linda Sizemore, PhD.

Following their initial visit, LIFE patients are encouraged to attend the program’s Thrivership seminars (free and open to the public) including “Eat to Beat Malignancy and Walk Away from Cancer” and “Self Esteem and Sexual Intimacy After Cancer” facilitated by the LIFE expert medical team.

Dr. Sizemore, who is a clinical psychologist and one of the presenters of the Sexual Intimacy Thrivership seminar, knows first-hand the importance of these educational seminars and the value of the group setting.

Dr. Sizemore herself was surprised at her own initial feelings following a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. “I had a talk with myself, and I said for women everywhere I have to work this out....the more you share it, the easier it becomes.”

The Thrivership seminars, like the comprehensive, individual prescriptions for survivorship are all part of empowering patients to move forward and continue healing.

“We are providing survivors with education as a form of support,” Dr. Rosenberg explained. “There is a window of opportunity, the right “teaching moment” following treatment when patients are amenable to hearing about the kind of strategies they can use to modify their risks.”

“I think knowledge is power and I like that I am now armed with all this information,” Wanetick said.

Dr. Rosenberg works to share knowledge with patients and other healthcare providers, teaching the LIFE health professional course, and serving as a clinical assistant professor at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine where she has a special interest in mentoring residents in preventive health.

American Cancer Society sponsored Preventive Medicine Resident Sara Brenner Spinnato, MD, described her experience with the LIFE program as inspirational.

“Dr. Rosenberg stands as a shining example of how physicians are called to be creative, collaborative, and compassionate in all aspects of healthcare. In implementing this program, her team is doing something innovative that advances patient care not only within the confines of the hospital, but also out in the community where survivors live their lives,” said Dr. Spinnato.

“Cancer survivors today are living rich and active lives, and every survivor needs to feel empowered. There are no guarantees, but LIFE helps navigate the road ahead,” said Dr. Rosenberg.

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From left, Linda Sizemore, PhD; Carol A. Rosenberg, MD; and Arlene Wanetick.

