

Empathy for Patients

Evanson Northwestern Healthcare (ENH) specialized oncology nurse Carole H. Martz, RN, MSN, AOCN, talks about her enduring relationships with cancer survivors, what it takes to prevent cancer reoccurrence and how to help cancer survivors regain their normal lives. The Clinical Coordinator for the Living in the Future (LIFE) Cancer Survivorship program at ENH, Martz recently received the 2008 Oncology Nursing Society Excellence in Survivor Advocacy Award.

Question: You have worked with more than 350 cancer survivors through LIFE since Nov. 1, 2006. Do you have a particular cancer survivor's story that comes to mind?

Answer: I have heard so many intriguing stories. I recently met with a breast cancer survivor named Rhoda Markovitz. She was interested in learning how to reduce her stress, find a new job and educate herself about how to improve her nutrition and physical fitness.

Rhoda was also experiencing lingering treatment-related side effects like splitting nails, numbness in her under arm and chest wall, and post-surgical pain. I discussed strategies to address her needs and educated her as to which side effects were normal, when they could be expected to diminish, ways to help alleviate them and which symptoms would need to be reported to her ENH multidisciplinary team.

Q: Based on your patients' experiences, what is the hardest part of being a cancer survivor?

A: When they are referred to the LIFE program, survivors are learning how to adjust to fewer healthcare interactions. But many of them like Rhoda are frightened because they are no longer receiving frequent reassurance from their healthcare team. Suddenly, they are out in the world on their own and feel vulnerable. A recent Institute of Medicine's report termed this experience as "lost in transition."

Q: How can LIFE program help them?

A: We offer cancer survivors hope as they make the transition from active treatment into the life they have ahead of them. We set them on the path to wellness after cancer.

During the Survivorship Care Plan visit, I provide patients with an individualized summary of their cancer care and an outline of specific information on the latent side effects and surveillance examinations required. I recommend programs that address their specific concerns discussed during our session.

We also encourage them to participate in our Myra Weis Rubenstein Survivorship 101: Thrivership educational seminars. Programs like "Eat to Beat Malignancy and Walk Away from Cancer" and "Self Esteem and Sexual Intimacy After Cancer" provide the

survivors and their families and friends the necessary information to adjust to their life after cancer in a healthy manner.

The new LIFEstyle Fitness Program for Survivors offered at the Recreation Center of Highland Park in partnership with the LIFE program is another example of how we assist survivors to achieve their potential. It helps cancer survivors learn how to exercise safely after treatment.

Q: How does the LIFE program fit into the continuum of ENH cancer care?

A: Cancer survivorship is a distinct phase of care in the cancer continuum. We provide survivors with the tools they need to communicate with their primary care physicians by sharing their individualized Survivorship Care Plans.

These plans help to bridge their care from oncology to the primary care setting. We remind survivors that their oncology teams are still there to assist them if needed.

The LIFE program gives survivors information on how to promote their psychological and physical well-being in order to prevent cancer recurrences and new cancer development. I find it so exhilarating to help them take back control of their lives and feel that there is more life to live!

The ENH LIFE program receives funding support from the Lance Armstrong Foundation, the Myra Rubenstein Weis Health Resource Center and the Kemper Educational and Charitable Foundation. For more information about the LIFE program at ENH, call (847) 492-5700 (Ext. 1262). ■



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