



Cancer Care: Resources for Caregivers

By Cassandra Van Dyck

It seems that these days, almost everyone knows someone who has had cancer. It might be a relative, a friend, a child, or a spouse. If you don't, you likely have someone in your life who has supported a family member or friend through the disease. Finding out that a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer is never easy. So many questions might flow through your mind, based on what you've heard or what you've seen others experience. Will they need surgery? Radiation treatment? Chemotherapy? How will these things affect them? You will likely feel afraid, and there's a good chance that you will also be tempted to tuck that fear away because you think that whatever fear you're feeling, your loved one must be feeling that all the more intensely.

Caregiving is challenging in so many ways. Perhaps one of the most, if not the most, challenging parts of caregiving is learning how to care for your care partner while also caring for yourself. Being diagnosed with cancer is hard for the person affected, but it is also hard for their caregivers. Getting support in your journey is crucial.

SUPPORT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

It is a gift to give your time, attention, and care to someone who is battling cancer. One of the ways you can help them is to ensure that they are supported in as many ways as possible. You may be able to provide support in lots of ways, but you cannot do it all, nor should you. Having extra support will help your loved one, and you, cope.

Your loved one will meet doctors and specialists and will most likely be informed about support groups and programs. Spend some time looking in to these resources and encourage them to

access the supports. Consider attending a group with them for the first time if they are nervous. There are lots of groups offered that patients and caregivers can attend together, which may make the initial meeting more comfortable. Connecting with other people that are having similar experiences can provide immeasurable amounts of support.

The BC Cancer Agency offers a number of supports, such patient and family counselling, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and Relaxation & Stress Management. For more information, visit www.bccancer.bc.ca.

Companioning Community Care Program is a volunteer program which offers on-site and in home programs for adults directly affected by life limiting illness, cancer treatment, bereavement or disability. Visit www.familyservicesbc.ca for more information.

Look Good Feel Better is a charitable cancer program “dedicated to empowering women to manage the effects that cancer and its treatment can have on their appearance. Created from a belief that if a woman with cancer can be helped to look good, chances are she’ll feel better, her spirits will be lifted and she’ll be empowered to face her illness with greater confidence.” For more information, visit www.lbfb.ca

Lions Gate Hospital offers a prostate cancer support group on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7PM. Contact Ted Butterfield at 604-780-5397 or tbutterfield@shaw.ca for more information.

SUPPORT FOR YOUR TEAM

Accessing support as a team – with your loved one and any other friends or family members that are supporting them - can be beneficial. It is possible for conflicts to develop with siblings or other caregivers and for emotions to come up that might be hard to process with your loved one and support team. Treatment and estate planning or managing day-to-day tasks can become tumultuous topics. Talking through these emotions and having support to work through conflicts can help you to support your loved one and work better with their caregiving team.

Inspire Health’s LIFE program focuses on “...exercise, meditation, nutrition, stress reduction, healthy sleep practices, group sharing and healthy communication.” Family members are welcome to join. Visit www.inspirehealth.ca for more information

CancerConnection.ca is an online community for cancer patients and their friends and family. Participants discuss topics such as stress and waiting for test results and dealing with the emotional stress of caregiving.

SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF

Accessing support for yourself, separately from your loved one, will help you work through some of the emotions and practical difficulties, such as scheduling or family conflicts, you're experiencing. While attending groups with your loved one can be helpful, it is also useful to meet with other caregivers or professionals so that you feel that you can express yourself freely without effecting your loved one.

NSCR's Caregiver Support Program offers Network Groups and Walk & Talks. Our groups are an opportunity for caregivers to connect with other caregivers, share what they're experiencing through tears or laughter, and to share resources and tips. See our events page for details on meeting times.

The Canadian Cancer Society's Information Specialists are available by phone. They can answer questions about treatment and side effects, clinical trials, coping with cancer, emotional support services and help in the community. Call toll-free at 1-888-939-3333.

BOOKS

Register, Cheri. *Living with Chronic Illness: Days of Patience and Passion*

Samples, Pat. *Daily Comforts for Caregivers*

Silver, Marc. *Breast Cancer Husband: How to Help Your Wife (And Yourself) Through Diagnosis, Treatment, and Beyond*

All books are available in NSCR's Library.

"When it rains, look for rainbows. When it's dark, look for stars."

"I have loved the stars too fondly to be scared of the night." - Galileo