

Oncology healthcare providers have an obligation to support cancer survivors, not just during active treatment, but also long after they have completed therapy. By providing survivorship care education and establishing programs using evidence-based practice, the specific needs and resources required to aid survivors in this new transition and journey can be identified. Survivors need to be guided, informed, and have their unique needs addressed.

The Next Journey

Moving forward after cancer diagnosis and treatment

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We are fortunate enough to be living during an era in which we have an emphasis placed on cancer survivorship. On June 4, cancer survivors throughout the United States celebrated National Cancer Survivors Day.

Advancements in cancer treatments have led to an estimated 15.5 million cancer survivors living in the United States (American Cancer Society, 2016). The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (2017) defines a *survivor* as a person with cancer from the time of diagnosis through the balance of his or her life, as well as family members, friends, and other caregivers who are affected. Many patients for whom we care may not see themselves as survivors. Living with a cancer diagnosis and having undergone treatment is unique to the person who experiences it. One thing a patient will tell you is that life, as it was known to them, was forever changed after a cancer diagnosis.

After an alarming diagnosis of cancer, many patients put on their “game face.” The reality is harsh; this is not a game. A heavy burden sets in for individuals and their support system. The only resolve is to survive. With determination, they surrender to the trusting hands of their oncologists, advanced practitioners, and nurses. They often have blind faith. A transformation begins, and patients can learn to adapt and reclaim their lives. Often, they feel that they cannot show weakness and that they must appear superhuman. Patients push through the mental and physical exhaustion, fear, and

myriad of side effects. After the treatment, patients and their families may wonder, “Has the fight ended?” Oncology nurses know that this point in time is the beginning of the aftermath.

We can easily forget that cancer survivors are not superhuman and that patients and families need to be supported to allow them time to become human again. Survivors also need support to resume their lives. Survivors often face a multitude of consequences from their cancer and treatment and, therefore, do not have to wear a smile and be cheerful every day. The reality is that, oftentimes, they do not, and that is OK. For this and many other reasons, survivorship care is critical. The focus needs to shift from illness to wellness. Survivorship care and survivorship resources provide a sanctuary for cancer survivors to shed their superhuman suit and deal with the lasting issues through a positive and holistic approach.

After receiving a cancer diagnosis and undergoing treatment, survivors must take the essential steps to journey forward with their new normal (National Cancer Institute, 2014). These steps include promoting healthy living and the ability to cope. Survivors need to understand the importance of cancer screening to prevent future recurrence or new cancers, management of late effects related to treatment, and the aging process.

Topics, such as nutrition, exercise, and alternative medicine, are important to survivors. Prevention of heart disease and diabetes helps to promote a healthier future for patients. In addition, studies show that maintaining a healthy weight during and

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