

HOW TO REACH US

If you have any suggestions for topics, articles or just need to talk to us, please feel free to contact us. You can reach **LET'S TALK..... NEWSLETTER** at Forum Health's Cancer CareCenters by calling (330) 740-4152 or (800) 222-4603.

TAKING CHARGE

Written by Deborah M. Dashko, RN, BA, LPC, CPDS, OCN, CHES

As you prepare for another round of chemotherapy or radiation therapy, it is important to play an active role in decisions being made. Participating in this process will help you feel more in control of your own health, help you to overcome the feelings of helplessness and depression and ensure that you get the best care possible. And guess what, it's your right! Be sure to keep an open line of communication and share information with your doctor and healthcare team. Ask questions you or your family might have about your current therapy or something you have heard or read about. After all, the team is there to help you and you are both working toward the same goal: victory over cancer.

ADJUSTING TO YOUR DIAGNOSIS

Written by Deborah M. Dashko, RN, BA, LPC, CPDS, OCN, CHES

Adjusting to your diagnosis may take time. Remember that each person reacts in his or her own way. It often helps to:

•**Acknowledge your feelings.**

When you learn you have cancer, you may feel shocked, angry, afraid or discouraged. Your feelings are normal. Don't deny or try to ignore them. With time and support, you can learn to work through your feelings.

•**Learn more about your cancer and possible treatments.**

You may have many questions about your cancer and treatment plan. Treatments are constantly improving. Many side effects have been lessened or eliminated. Knowing what to expect may help ease your worries.

•**Identify coping strategies.**

Think about how you've handled other challenges. Where did you draw support from? What personality traits and methods of coping have helped you in the past? Then, identify which coping methods and supports can help you through your illness.

•**Talk with family and friends.**

They can offer valuable support and understanding. Balance your need for privacy with the benefits of discussing cancer and your feelings with those you care about.

•**Join a support group or speak with another cancer survivor.**

When you join a support group or speak with a survivor, you'll be able to share your feelings with others having a similar experience. You will learn practical tips and skills for coping and living with cancer. It provides you the opportunity to get more information.

CANCER-RELATED FATIGUE

Written by Pam Stephenson, RN, MSN, CS, OCN

Have you noticed yourself feeling more tired than usual since you've started your cancer treatment? If so, you are not alone. Many people who are fighting cancer complain of fatigue. Cancer treatments (chemotherapy or radiation), a sluggish appetite, decreased activity, or the cancer itself can cause this fatigue.

Everyone experiences fatigue differently. Cancer related fatigue is sometimes described as: feeling weak, washed out, totally exhausted, confused, or foggy; and can lead to changes in your mood such as impatience and irritability. The most important thing to remember if you are suffering from cancer related fatigue is that it is not your fault. You should not feel bad or guilty for not having the energy you are used to. Feeling guilty will just add to any depression you might already be feeling and can leave you more fatigued in the end. But remember, depression because of your cancer diagnosis is a different matter and should be treated separately. Talk to your doctor about the proper treatment for depression.

There are some things you can do to lessen your cancer-related fatigue and are listed below.

- **A well-balanced diet is important.** Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as grains.

- **Pace yourself.** You might find it helpful to break big jobs into smaller ones.
- **Focus on your priorities.** You won't be able to do everything you are used to so choose only those things that are most important to accomplish.
- **Reduce noise and distractions** when you are trying to get the job done.
- **Allow people to help** with errands and more demanding tasks such as grocery shopping and mowing.
- **Take up a hobby.** Doing something fun and relaxing may help to distract you from how bad you are feeling and stimulate your attention.

Even though you do not feel like doing much of anything, and you might think it best to take it easy and rest, too much rest is not good either. Cancer-related fatigue does not go away by resting like regular fatigue does. In fact, it can make it worse. It has been found that light exercise actually helps restore some of the energy your missing. Just walking for 5 – 10 minutes a day is a good place to start and can be built up to a comfortable level for you. (Of course, you should first talk with your doctor about any exercise program before you begin.)

Keep in touch with your doctor and nurses. They can help you decide which symptoms are manageable and which are not. You should notify your doctor if you:

- become dizzy
- feel unbalanced
- fall or hurt yourself
- have trouble waking up
- have trouble catching your breath
- have a sudden increase in fatigue

It is hard for people to understand cancer-related fatigue because it is so different from the fatigue that most people can relate to. It is important to remember to keep the lines of communication open with your doctors, nurses, loved ones and employers. Most people are willing to help you get through this time as long as they understand what you need.

COMMUNICATION

Written by Deborah M. Dashko, RN, BA, LPC, CPDS, OCN, CHES

Communicating openly with those close to you is so important. Fighting cancer is a joint effort, between you, your family and friends and the medical team. This partnership is based on honesty, Communication, education and love. Sometimes it may seem like a struggle, but you, just like many people before you can learn to live with cancer.

Not too many decades ago, cancer was not discussed openly. Any mention of cancer was made in hushed tones. Cancer gradually became the most feared word in the English language. Today, many people remain reluctant to talk about it, even though it is now a rather common disease and often curable.

How open you should be about your cancer and treatment is entirely up to you. Cancer is a personal disease, but everyone close to you suffers in some way. Often times, you, your family and friends are thinking the same things and trying to cope with them. Communication and working as a team has been proven to be helpful to many cancer survivors and their loved ones.

Here are some tips for talking about cancer with:

•Your partner

Your cancer affects both you and your partner. It's important to talk about each other's feelings and needs honestly and openly.

•Friends, family and co-workers

You may want to tell certain people about your cancer for various reasons. In other cases, you may wish to keep it private. This is your personal choice. Just remember, you don't have to fight this battle alone.

•Children

If you have children, don't try to hide your diagnosis from them. In many cases, even young children sense when something is wrong. They may feel confused and afraid. Being honest can help give them a better understanding of what to expect. Try to give a simple, clear explanation that is appropriate for their age. Remember your healthcare team is there should you need help with this.

KEEP A JOURNAL

Written by Deborah M. Dashko, RN, BA, LPC, CPDS, OCN, CHES

Keeping a journal may help you learn to identify and cope with your feelings. Your journal can be a tool to record your life and to reflect upon it later. Sometimes just writing about your feelings enables you to be more objective. Cancer survivors have claimed "putting your cancer experience on paper can give you some distance from it". Keeping a journal also forces you to spend time alone, and reading it months later can show you what progress you have made.

Start by taking 20 minutes everyday to write down your feelings. During your “time out” write down what your emotions are at that moment. Then, think about what made you feel that way. If you have negative feelings, think about things you can do to feel better. Some people have used their journals as a place to express gratitude and what they are thankful for, or things that they have learned or a way to express challenges that they have overcome. Others have used it as a place to write down positive statements or affirmations or a place to draw and sketch.

Writing can be a way of organizing your thoughts, a way of letting go or a vehicle to release emotions. It can be a safe place to discharge your feelings on a daily basis. Some people find it difficult to write at first but claim that with practice, patience, and perseverance, writing has been a great coping tool.

WHY IS THERE A NURSING SHORTAGE?

Written by: Tracy Skripac, RN, MSN, AOCN, CHPN

The national nursing shortage has made headlines across the country. In our local area, the recent nursing strike has created a great awareness of this shortage. The nursing shortage is real and it is a serious problem that is expected to get worse over the years to come. There are many factors that have played a role in the current nursing shortage.

The biggest problem is the advancing age of working nurses. The average age of working RN's is almost 46 years. This means that in 10 years, more than 40% of working RN's will be over the age of 50 and thinking about retirement. And, think of what this could mean to nursing in just 15 – 20 years. It is expected that by the year 2015, there will be a need for 120,000 nurses across the country.

Another big problem is that fewer high school and college students are choosing nursing as a career. Over the past five years or so, there has been a drastic decline in the number of young people wanting to enroll in college nursing programs. A similar situation is the growing job market for women that has steadily increased since the 1970's. Nursing has mostly been a “female” profession. Women now realize there are many more career opportunities to pursue that may not include working weekends and night shifts.

For the people who are becoming nurses, there are many opportunities in today's nursing job market instead of simply choosing to work in the traditional place like a hospital or nursing home. There are outpatient centers, home care agencies, pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, doctor offices, and health organizations that hire nurses. Although these are great opportunities, they

leave hospitals or nursing homes as less desirable places for nurses to work.

Insurance companies and limited payment to hospitals for services are also problems adding to the nursing shortage. The majority of a hospital's budget is labor costs and the largest labor force within hospitals is nursing. The cost of employing enough nurses along with decreasing payment for patient services causes budget cuts and adds to the problem.

The result of the nursing shortage right now is that nurses are overworked. Heavy workloads and long hours may seem neverending and overwhelming to nurses. The media coverage of the situation also sends a negative message to the public and young people who would otherwise choose nursing as a career.

The answer to the nursing shortage is not simple and “quick fixes” will not solve this problem. Salaries will need to be increased, incentives will need to be offered, and staffing demands will need to be met to assure nurses are content. Nursing schools need to find ways to encourage high school students to enter the field of nursing, perhaps by providing financial aid or scholarships. Payment for services will need to be better established to allow hospitals to keep their nurses and attract new ones. In short, it is a combined effort that is needed to provide a long-term solution to the critical problem of the nursing shortage.

NUTRITION IS THE KEY

Written by Debbie Gilbert, MS, RD, LD

A well balanced diet is an important factor for your body to work at its best. Good nutrition is even more important for people with cancer because:

- Patients who eat well during their treatment are able to cope better with the side effects of treatment. Patients who eat well may be able to handle a higher dose of certain treatments.
- A healthy diet can help keep up your strength, prevent body tissues from breaking down, and rebuild tissues that cancer treatment may harm.
- When you are unable to eat enough food or the right kind of food, your body uses stored nutrients as a source of energy. As a result, your natural defenses are weaker and your body cannot fight infection as well. Yet, this defense system is especially important to you now, because cancer patients are often at risk of getting an infection.

A variety of different foods is a good rule to follow. No one food or group of foods contains all of the nutrients you need. A diet to keep your body strong will include daily servings from these food groups:

- **Fruits and Vegetables:** Raw or cooked vegetables, fruits, and fruit juices provide certain vitamins (such as A and C) and minerals the body needs.
- **Protein Foods:** Protein helps you body heal itself and fight infection. Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk, yogurt, and cheese give you protein as well as many vitamins and minerals.
- **Grains:** Grains, such as bread, pasta, rice, and cereals, provide a variety of carbohydrates and B vitamins. Carbohydrates provide a good source of energy, which the body needs to function well.
- **Dairy Foods:** Milk and other dairy products provide protein and many vitamins and are the best source of calcium.

The Food Guide Pyramid is designed to help Americans choose a healthy diet. The pyramid gives the amounts and types of foods to eat each day. It emphasizes five food groups; Bread, Fruit, Vegetable, Milk and Meat. When your body is undergoing the additional stress of illness or treatment such as surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy, the need for calories and protein are increased. The Food Guide Pyramid can be adapted to meet your special needs. For a copy of the Food Guide Pyramid or more information on high calorie, high protein foods for people experiencing weight loss call 330-740-4199.

Lymphedema

Written by Linda Stickelmeyer, RN, OCN

Lymphedema is fluid buildup in spaces, usually in limbs. Some types of cancers and other health problems can cause lymphedema. Lymphedema may occur any time lymph nodes are removed. The removal causes an interruption in normal flow and circulation of lymph fluid. Lymph fluid is carried by lymph nodes. At risk for lymphedema are people who have lymph nodes removed, radiated or whose cancer spreads to lymph nodes. The most common types of cancers related to lymphedema are breast, prostate, lymphoma, sarcoma, melanoma, head and neck and pelvic cancers.

Lymphedema can occur immediately after surgery, within a few months, years, or even after 20 years. Sometimes, no matter what is done lymphedema still can occur. An infectious process, a clot, or new cancer can also cause lymphedema. The cause needs to be determined in most cases before

possible treatment can begin. If you have not had surgery or treatment as yet, speak with your physician and /or allied health professionals for tips on how to possibly prevent lymphedema. If you have developed lymphedema discuss you situation with your physician for potential work-up and treatment. After the cause is determined, appropriate treatment can start. Self care, exercise as instructed, skin care and decongestive lymphatic therapy can provide help. There is a *National Lymphedema Network* that can provide useful information and help. Their address is as follows:

*National Lymphedema Network
1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 1111
Oakland, California 94612
Tel: 800-541-3259 Fax: 510-208-3110*

GET A "NAVIGATOR"!!!!

*Written by Deborah M. Dashko, RN, BA, LPC,
CPDS, OCN, CHES*

Have you recently been diagnosed with cancer or know someone who is receiving treatment? Are you feeling alone? Do you need to talk to someone who has survived the same type of cancer? If so, the *Navigator Program* is there to help you! It is free and available to all cancer patients and their families in the tri-county area.

This program is the first of its kind in the state of Ohio. It matches cancer patients who are receiving treatment with cancer survivors ("navigators"). The program can also match loved ones of cancer patients with loved ones of the "navigators". They meet in a mutual location or talk by telephone.

"Navigators must be at least one year out of treatment and attend a training session prior to being matched up with a patient. The two-hour training features the mission of the program, how to handle a crisis and what is expected of the volunteer "navigator".

The American Cancer Society funds the Navigator Program with dollars raised from the Relay for Life. To date, there are 43 people in the area who are trained navigators and willing to talk to current patients and their families.

"Men, women and children of all ages are needed! Regardless of the type of cancer.....we need your help," stated Debbie Moore, coordinator of the program. If you or someone you know is receiving treatment or you are interested in becoming a navigator, contact the American Cancer Society today at (330) 533-0546.

