Embracing the Present – And What Matters Most

By Dennis Wirth

My world was forever turned upside down when my wife of 32 years, Kathy, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in October 2010. As her caregiver, I accompanied her to treatments, got her anything she needed to make her comfortable, and tried my best to understand and empathize with her fears and concerns. Through her experiences and my own, I learned the importance of living life to the fullest and embracing relationships with those who truly mattered.

Before her diagnosis, little problems around the house or dealing with a difficult situation would appear to be a big deal. However, after she was diagnosed, we realized who and what truly mattered in our lives, and the little things suddenly seemed trivial. In my opinion, this is because it’s not what you have, but who you have, that will give you the strength and courage to keep fighting.

Seek out family members and friends who understand what you’re going through and are willing to listen to your fears and concerns, and don’t worry about anyone else or what they’re thinking. What meant the most to Kathy was having a few key people around to talk about how she was feeling and what she was going through. The close relationships she had with family and friends were most important to her, and it’s what helped her stay as strong as she did for more than three years. Also, not everyone needs to know about you or your loved one’s cancer diagnosis or how it’s progressing if you don’t want them to – it’s perfectly acceptable to keep things private. Most people don’t have intentions of making you upset; they just can’t relate to the experience or don’t realize how they’re coming across.

It is surreal when you or a loved one gets a cancer diagnosis. You go into a supermarket or run some errands and see people preoccupied with their own thoughts and seemingly living life as normal, and you feel like your life has come to a halt. This is completely normal, as are feelings of loneliness and frustration. Even so, it’s important to realize that life will always go on and you have to make the most of every day. Find a reason to keep getting up each morning. We kept as much of our normal routine as possible for as long as we could. We also spent extra time with the family and had fun whenever possible. We even went on a fabulous cruise to Alaska and took our grown children for a weeklong vacation in Hawaii during the 10-month window that Kathy was cancer-free.

During Kathy’s treatment, the staff at the Blumenthal Cancer Center became like a second family to us, and I can’t thank them enough for their care and compassion. They were (and continue to be) the best. And now, as I fight my own battle with cholangiocarcinoma (a bile duct and liver cancer), I’m grateful for the lessons we learned and the relationships we formed. I look for purpose and meaning in every day, and will continue to do so in memory of my wife.

We’re Here to Help

For more information about cancer support services for patients and caregivers, please call Brooke Laster, LCSW, at 201-634-5787, or email blaster@valleyhealth.com.
Need Information? Ask our Medical Librarian!

Being diagnosed with cancer can leave you with many questions about your condition. Valley’s Medical Library (located at the hospital’s main campus in Ridgewood) has a wealth of cancer information and resources that can help you understand your diagnosis, treatment options and more.

If you’d like help researching cancer topics, please contact Director of Library Services, Claudia Allocco (below), at 201-447-8285 or callocc@valleyhealth.com.

Cancer Survivorship Series

Thriving Through and Beyond Cancer

The Cancer Survivorship Series is an ongoing series that educates, informs and empowers patients to better manage their health and enhance their quality of life during and after cancer treatment. Workshops are held at the Blumenthal Cancer Center in the Luckow Pavilion, 1 Valley Health Plaza, Paramus. Space is limited; to register, please call Brooke Laster, LCSW, at 201-634-5787, or email blaster@valleyhealth.com.

Holistic Nutrition

Tuesday, October 4, 6–7:30 p.m.

Kristen Bradley, R.N., an integrative nutritionist with Valley’s Center for Integrative Medicine, will help participants learn how to change the way they look and think about food. Discover how to make smarter and cleaner choices that can improve overall long-term health, and learn about mindful eating for improved digestion.

Valley’s Patient Portal

Log in for appointments, test results and more

As you go through your cancer treatment, it can be a challenge to keep track of test results and other information related to your diagnosis and treatment. But with The Valley Hospital’s secure patient portal, the information you need is just a click away and in one place for easy access.

At Your Fingertips

Valley’s patient portal offers a centralized location for reviewing your lab results*, medical reports, vitals, medical history, upcoming appointments, and select diagnostic imaging procedures (including mammography and X-rays).

Sharing is Easy

In addition to viewing and downloading important information, Valley’s patient portal allows you to share your information quickly and easily with physicians or family members.

*Test results appear after a 36-hour waiting period to give a physician time to contact the patient about the results.

There’s More Online

Visit valleyhealthcancercenter.com and click on “For Patients & Families,” then “Cancer Creates Newsletter,” to find current and previous issues of Cancer Creates.

We Want to Hear from You!

Got an inspiring story or helpful tip to share? Let us know, and it may appear in our next edition of Cancer Creates! Email submissions to sardito@valleyhealth.com.