

FOREWORD

On Becoming a Cancer Survivor

Cancer is an intensely personal experience. Yet it routinely involves a variety of social interactions with family, friends, coworkers, and employers. The diagnosis of cancer brings up serious concerns of death, pain, suffering, and loss of control and dignity.

It is an interesting observation that while overall survival following a diagnosis of malignancy is at least equal, if not superior, to that of a diagnosis of heart failure, few people told they have heart disease will declare, “Oh no, I am going to die.” However, such a response is not uncommon when the diagnosis is cancer.

No group of diseases generates more fear and anxiety: *Why me? How did I get it? What did I do wrong? Will I transmit the cancer to my children through my genes? Will I experience the same miserable death my mother told me my grandfather experienced when he was diagnosed with some “unknown type of cancer” forty years ago? Can I survive? Will I be able to work during treatment? Does radiation therapy “burn”? How bad will the vomiting be after chemotherapy?*

There are so many questions, with answers desperately sought—some very complex and not answerable, others very direct and simple (such as “Will I lose my hair?”). All of this is rushing into one consciousness over a remarkably short period. It can be truly overwhelming.

Thus we see the important need for a commonsense, straight-talking book that describes the cancer experience to patients and their families, including standard diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, management

options, and toxicities of treatment. The book should help the patient and his/her family through this experience, answer commonly asked questions, and point to where one can receive appropriate responses to other concerns (e.g., “Where do I find information I can use to help me understand my cancer?”).

Of great importance is that the book have as a major aim the goal of reducing anxiety and helping those confronted with this disease to marshal their internal resources to conquer their natural fears and ultimately learn to become cancer survivors.

Does such a book exist?

You are about to read it.

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