

Cancer – An Intense House Guest

A Practical Guide

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Table of Contents

Introduction Why Me, O	3
Lord? PrayerWhat Cancer	3
Cannot Do What About My	3
Family?Spreading the	5
Word Talking About	5
Cancer FriendsFriends	6
You Have Not Met Support	6
Groups Extended Support	7
Groups Chemo Bald Is	7
Beautiful	7
	7
	9
	9
What Ministry Is God Preparing You For?	10
Don't Forget The Little Ones	10
Choosing a Doctor Talking To The	10
Doctor Keep A Journal Lists	11
Spreading Germs Between People	11
Spreading Germs On Surfaces	12
Food Dental CareMouth Sores	12
Partner In Treatment Fatigue Set	13
Realistic Goals	13
	14
	14
	14
	14
	15
	15
Keep On With Your Life As Much As You Can	15
Focus on the Positive	15
Uplifting Music Reading	16
Humor Moods Mood Lifters	16
Don't Plan On Your Funeral	16
Hospice Care Cancer In	17
Children Insurance	17
Conclusion	17
	18
	18
	18
	19

Introduction

Cancer has come into your home, or you may still be going through tests to determine whether you have cancer. Hopefully the cancer will be in your home for only a short visit, but it may have moved in to stay. As our friend Mary says, “Cancer is such an intense house guest.” Following are a few notes about what we learned when cancer came to visit our home. These notes are not appropriate for everyone, but they can serve as a starting point.

These notes are meant as a practical guide for people with cancer, not a spiritual guide; however, we cannot separate our spiritual lives from the rest of our lives. Therefore, in different sections Bible citations are listed when it seems appropriate.

How does one organize notes about a life-changing event? Each time we reread these notes, we think that there must be a better way to organize them. We also think of something we have forgotten to include. Feel free to reorganize them and then pass them on to your friends who have had cancer come into their homes. When we ask our friends to read it, they also mention things we forgot. You will also note some things are mentioned in several places. Everything concerning cancer is interconnected, and it just seemed appropriate.

The last two sentences in this document are:

“In conclusion, there are no right answers or wrong answers.

There are just answers that work for you.” Remember these two sentences as you read and apply what you are reading.

Why Me, O Lord?

This is one of the first questions we ask. Not because we are selfish, or because we think nothing bad should happen to us, but because we are human. We may ask with Job (19:22), “Why do you persecute me...?” A common first reaction to cancer is to deny it is present. If we refuse to acknowledge it – then – it just cannot be present. If the cancer is caught early, there may not be any symptoms. Lack of symptoms makes denial of the cancer easy. We may find acceptance as we read the book of Job. As time passes, we will gradually accept that cancer has moved in. Remember, God never gives us more than we can handle with His help. As we learn to turn towards the Lord and to lean on Him, it is easier to accept that cancer has moved in.

Prayer

If you do not regularly pray, now is a good time to start. One of your first prayers when the diagnosis process starts will probably be, “Why me, Lord?” You will be tempted to pray that the tests come back negative, but is this what you want to pray for? It might be better to pray for an accurate diagnosis. If you pray that the tests come back negative, are you praying for false results?

A friend said she felt paralyzed with the family crisis and did not know how to pray, but she asked everyone to pray for her daughter who at 5 years of age had cancer. With time she has become a prayer warrior.

We are blessed because we have the Holy Spirit interceding for us – He knows our needs and knows what we should be praying for, even if we do not know what that is, or cannot even get words out to pray (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is not just asking for a cure and for guidance; it is also a time for confession, for thanksgiving (yes, you can thank the Lord, even as you face cancer), and to praise the Lord.

You may find it comforting and reassuring to include your medical caregivers in your prayers. Asking God to give these men and women sound judgment, skill, and decision-making can boost your confidence in your treatment.

Paul writes, “Pray without ceasing.” (I Thessalonians 5:17) As you come to depend on the Lord, it becomes natural. To help with your prayer life, keep a Bible handy and read. You do not need to set a goal of reading 5 chapters a day. If you do not have experience reading the Bible, start off in the Psalms. These are hymns of praise. Then ask people who have more experience reading the Bible to suggest further reading. If you do not have anyone to ask, then move on to Paul’s epistles: Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians... Here are a few readings we have found helpful. You will notice that we don’t like to read one verse, but to read verses in context.

When afraid: Psalm 27

When worried or anxious: Psalm 46

Psalm 121

Matthew 6:19-34

*When bereaved: John 11:1-44 John 20 1 Corinthians 15 2 Corinthians
1:3-7 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 5:28*

When depressed: Psalm 34 Psalm 71 Isaiah 40

*When discouraged: Psalm 23 Psalm 42 Psalm 43 Isaiah
55 2 Corinthians 4*

When faith needs a boost: Hebrews 11

When feeling sorrowful: Psalm 46
Psalm 51
Matthew 28
John 14

When friends fail to support you: Psalm 27

When lonely: Psalm 27

When sick: Psalm 6
Psalm 38
Psalm 39
Psalm 41
Psalm 67
Isaiah 26
2 Corinthians 12:9-10

When thankful: Psalm 100

When God seems distant: Psalm 138

What Cancer Cannot Do

Our friend Ann sent us the following poem. We have since seen it on bracelets.

Cancer is so **limited** . . .
It cannot cripple *Love*
It cannot shatter *Hope*
It cannot corrode *Faith*
It cannot destroy *Peace*
It cannot kill *Friendship*
It cannot suppress *Memories*
It cannot silence *Courage*
It cannot invade the *Soul*
It cannot steal *Eternal Life*

It cannot conquer the *Spirit*.

Author unknown

What About My Family?

If you are not able to provide the care that your family has grown accustomed to, they will have to adjust. When they realize you need their help and support, even the most useless husband can learn to pitch in and help.

Your caring-for-others instinct may manifest itself in an urge to clean house. If others offer to come in to provide assistance, you may decide that you need to get your house in order and all cleaned up so they do not have so much to do. Stopping to think about it, the concept does not

make a lot of sense, but at this stage we are operating on an emotional level, not a logical level.

Likewise, don't start putting all of your affairs in order "just in case." Important documents like a will and insurance and financial arrangements should always be kept current "just in case." However, a friend tells of selecting a replacement wife for her husband in the event she died. After making the decision, she decided not to tell either her husband or her friend that she had selected a replacement wife because she did not want to give either of them ideas. No point in having an affair to worry about, also.

It is appropriate for all of us to have an "in case of death" file with birth certificate, list of insurance policies, and a copy of our will.

Spreading the Word

Who you tell and when are extremely hard choices. You will probably offend someone. Many of your friends will be upset if you have cancer and you did not let them know as soon as you found out. Before you can spread the word, you need to be able to accept you do have cancer. For some it will be easy to talk about the cancer. For others it will be difficult. Is there a need to spread the word while you are going through tests? Only you can answer that question. Maybe you should wait until you know something, or maybe you should let your friends and family know as you are going through tests so they can provide support. We found out about Judy's cancer on Monday. By Friday she was in surgery. One of Herb's brothers-in-law wanted to know why we had not spread the word two weeks before. At the time Herb felt put-upon, but looking back on it, the brother-in-law was as scared as Herb was and did not know any other way to express it.

Talking About Cancer

Some people with cancer do not want to share with friends and family. This is fine. But many more like to have interactions with other people. Some can talk about their cancer or cancer in their families, and some cannot. Have a spokesperson prepared in the event you cannot talk about the cancer. For example, Herb's mother-in-law asked, when he called her after one of Judy's successful surgeries and he found himself unable to talk, "What's the matter – did she die?" If you do not want to be in that situation, develop a plan. Herb palmed many of the phone calls off on a sister, but he also recorded a message on a tape recorder in the event his voice failed him.

If you want to hear your friends fumble around trying to get up the courage to ask if you are going to die, by all means let them. But if you do not want this, have a spokesperson to answer those questions. Then you can focus on the positive when talking to your friends. Remember, you should be making the decisions as to what you want to do. Consider that you are on a pedestal and make the most of it.

Many of your friends may be in denial and may not mention cancer in your presence. By having a spokesperson, they can go to the spokesperson and find out without having to use the "C" word in your presence. You are ministering to every visitor who comes to see you. Strange as it may

seem, sometimes they need the ministering more than you do.

Friends (Proverbs 17:17) (Job 2:11-13)

When word gets out that you have cancer, some friends you have not seen in a long time will come see you, or call, or write. Other friends may disappear – they just don't know how to treat you, since they think you have changed – they don't want to do the wrong thing, so they stay away. Don't hold it against them. Write them a note. Even if they cannot get up the courage to come see you, they are probably praying for you on a daily basis. When they perceive that you have returned to being "you," though you never changed, they will come back. Sometimes they never accept that you are still you, and you may never see them again. Put them on your prayer list.

Some friends will come and sit and expect to be entertained. That is not your job. Try to instill the concept that frequent, short visits are better for you than long, boring visits. You have permission to ask these visitors to leave, so you can rest.

Friends You Have Not Met

When word gets out that you have cancer, it spreads among cancer survivors. They seem to come out of the woodwork. Some are acquaintances you did not know were cancer survivors. Some are strangers. They are friends you did not know you had. You will often be reminded of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36). You can talk about your fear of losing your hair with them, because they have been there and know firsthand what it feels like. With these friends, you can talk about anything. After you become a cancer survivor, you will join this cadre and step forward whenever you hear of someone being diagnosed with cancer.

Support Groups

Herb observed the Santa Rosa Children's Hospital staff trying to get parents involved with a support group, but many never did. There was so much to do and not enough time. On top of that, many of the parents figured they did not need any help. Talking to some of them in later years, they wish they had listened. There are too many things you needn't learn the hard way and many people out there who want to help make this time as easy as possible.

Extended Support Groups

On April 1, 2008, The Wall Street Journal published an article by Elizabeth Bernstein entitled *How to Support a Loved One – Reeling From Cancer Diagnosis*. It is definitely worth going to the archives of the Wall Street Journal and reading.

Ms. Bernstein mentions several books that are available for helping cancer patients and their families. They include:

[Help Me Live](#), by Ms. Hope;

[What Can I Do to Help](#), by Deborah Hutton;

[Cancer Etiquette](#), by Rosanne Kalick;

The Etiquette of Illness, by Susan P. Halpern.

Dr. Susan Blumhardt, an oncologist, recommends *When a Parent Has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children* by Wendy Harpham.

There are several web sites that provide support for patients and their caregivers. Among them are:

- www.cancer.org We have all heard about the American Cancer Society. This is their main web address. It has lots of good and reliable information. Use it.
- www.cancer.gov The web address is similar to the American Cancer Society's web address. One ends in gov and the other in org. This is the web site of the National Cancer Institute. It has lots of good and reliable information, also. Among other things this site offers is information for care givers, family, and friends.
- www.cancer.net This web site is designed for people living with cancer. It contains oncologist-approved/reviewed information for patients from the American Society of Clinical Oncologists.
- www.breastcancer.org This is a message board for patients with breast cancer and their families.
- www.lotsahelpinghands.com How do you organize the volunteers and all the practical needs of the cancer patient? Several times in this paper the need for lists and organizing volunteers is discussed. This web site provides a way to organize the volunteers. A support group for the patient is formed, and there is a calendar to insert needs and to coordinate the volunteers.
- www.talkingaboutcancer.com Cancer has a powerful emotional impact. Most of us need to talk through the issues involved to bring about closure. This web site is dedicated to serving that need.
- www.carepages.com Do you want to have to explain to 27 different friends how your child is doing? Each means well, but after awhile the pain of repeating the message can become overpowering. This web site allows families to set up sites to share information about the person who is sick.
- www.kaps4karing.org Join the group and knit or crochet caps, lap quilts, and baby items. The caps and lap quilts are donated to cancer patients, and the baby items are donated to local hospitals for preemies and critically-ill infants. You can log onto the site and request items you need.

Chemo

“Chemo” is short for chemotherapy. Each year there are improvements, and new treatments come out with fewer side effects. Where some years ago a chemo patient had to go into virtual isolation as the white blood cells were destroyed, many modern chemo drugs do not cause that drastic loss of white blood cells, and thus the risk of infection is not as great.

The chemo drugs are toxins designed to kill fast-growing cells. Cancer cells are fast-growing and are the target, but hair is also fast-growing. Some chemo causes nausea. There are other chemicals that can control nausea. Some chemo can kill the healthy crop of bacteria in your gut and induce bouts of diarrhea. While you sit on the pot, holding a wastebasket to catch the vomit, remember: all of this is to cure you so you can spend more time enjoying your family. Actually, you should call your doctor before you get to that point. There are many medications/treatments, which prevent side effects.

A friend tells of a friend who took a red-Kool-Aid-looking chemo. After each chemo session, she hosted a Kool-Aid party, and all would drink red Kool-Aid. Even though you may not need it, have a friend drive you to chemo and sit with you. It makes the time go much faster. Not everyone is strong enough for that task. Maybe those who aren't can be mowing your lawn while you are in chemo.

Bald Is Beautiful

If you take certain types of chemo, your hair will thin or it may fall out completely. The chemo drugs are attacking fast-multiplying cells, which include cancer cells and hair follicles. Understanding why it happens does not necessarily prepare one for the event. Thinking that it will not be a big deal, there are some who do not prepare. Some are more impacted by hair loss than others. Like Robin Roberts of ABC television's "Good Morning America," some people refuse to let cancer be in control. When her hair began to thin and come out in "chunks," she asked her hairdresser to shave her head. San Antonio Channel 12 news anchor Leslie Mouton lost her hair to chemo and broadcast the news with her baldhead exposed to the world.

The American Cancer Society understands these feelings and, especially for women, has wigs. Prior to starting chemo, go with one of your cancer survivor friends and get a wig. Select something close to your natural hair color and length. If you don't need it, wonderful. If you do need it, you have it.

All of that having been said, are you prepared for your eyebrows to fall out along with the hair on the top of your head? Have an eyebrow pencil handy.

One of our friends says that she frequents truck stops where bikers hang out. They often sell "dew rags," the kerchiefs many bikers wear. Her sister is on chemo, and she uses the "dew rags" not only to conceal her baldness, but also as fashion accessories.

The American Cancer Society needs hair for making wigs. If you have a friend with a fine mane of hair, suggest to her that she could donate some of it to help other cancer patients.

What Ministry Is God Preparing You For? (I Peter 1:6-9)

There is a reason cancer came to visit you and then moved in. You may never understand the reason, but God is using it to help you prepare for a ministry He has in mind for you. Herb would never have envisioned talking to a group about visiting cancer patients and their families. He would never have envisioned writing a devotion concerning cancer patients and their families. See “We Heard the Wings of Angels” on the Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church web site (www.shlutheran.org). Whatever God is preparing you for, open your arms and embrace it.

Don't Forget The Little Ones (Mark 10:14)

When you have cancer, you are not the only one who is impacted by the disease. Your children are used to having a certain amount of attention. If they do not get it, they may feel unloved, or worse, that the cancer is their fault. When a child has cancer, the siblings may inadvertently get pushed aside because the cancer patient needs all of the love and support. While the sibling may understand on a conscious level that his little sister needs the support, in the middle of the night when the lights are out and the closet monster is looking for prey, knowing on a conscious level does not help.

In many households the wife is the only adult. The husband, if he's there, functions as an overgrown teenager. If his wife cannot support him in the manner in which she has in the past, he may have some of the same problems as his children.

If your immune system is compromised, try to stay away from small children during the times when your white blood cell count is low. They carry lots of germs but are too young to understand that they could make you sicker. That having been said, many of the modern treatments do not devastate the immune system like some of the old ones. As one friend said, “If it were not for the kids, I wouldn't have had any visitors. The adults were too busy.”

Teenagers have an especially tough time. They are going through a time of life when they are establishing their independence, thus they often react angrily. With a parent with cancer, they know they should not react angrily, but when they do, they take on a load of guilt which makes matters worse. This problem is often worse when a single parent has cancer. While there are no easy answers, mention the problem to your doctor and alert the keeper of assignments that we need to schedule activities for the teenager.

Choosing a Doctor

You are facing one of the most difficult events in your life. You and your doctor are, at times, going to seem as close to one another as you are with your spouse or family. Communication and support are vital to your mental well-being. Your doctor needs to be completely open, frank (not blunt), informative, and able to provide you with emotional support. It's the doctor you look to for answers and understanding.

Doctors are human beings, too, with the same flaws as the rest of us. You may not like each other. The person treating you may not be able to provide emotional understanding, but rather can only focus on the disease.

Having a good rapport with the doctor, having trust in the person treating you, can be critical to how you feel, and to some extent what you feel. If you are not comfortable with the way you are being treated, there is no good reason not to find another doctor. How you get through this crisis, even if there is no hope for a cure, depends a lot on how you feel about the care you are getting from the medical staff. The first tenet of the doctor's Hippocratic Oath is "Do No Harm."

Many oncology practices have RNs and nurse practitioners who will actually do a lot of the procedures and education you receive. You can trust their knowledge. They are certified in this field and are in close collaboration with your doctor at every step.

Talking To The Doctor

When you talk to the doctor, take someone with you to help remember everything. Most of us remember only 30% to 40% of what the doctor tells us. Ask him to repeat until you understand and have it written down. Most doctors try to not talk over the patient's head, but if you do not understand what the doctor is saying, ask for an explanation. In the newspaper we often see people's letters to the medical columnist about their disease or medications. Your treatment team should provide all this information. If you are not getting it, ask.

Have a notebook, and record all conversations with the doctor and his staff. Record all medicines taken and when they are taken. Record all tests and the results of the tests. Record side effects and symptoms. This notebook should become your permanent record of your cancer treatment. As you move between doctors and labs, you may be the only one who has the complete story of your treatment. If you had a test run and the doctor does not have the results, knowing the name of the lab, the date, the time, and the technician involved will make finding the results quicker.

Ten years ago Herb & Judy would go into the doctor's office, each with a notebook. Each would take notes. The doctor still remembers their actions and recently mentioned it to one of his new assistants.

If you feel that you have a problem and need to talk to your doctor at 2:00 am, don't hesitate to place that call. It is better, however, to call with a minor problem during office hours than to wait for it to build into a crisis that justifies the call at 2:00 am.

Keep A Journal

This is different from your medical records notebook. Record your feelings, your thoughts, and your doubts. It could be written to be kept private, or it could be written to share at some future date. Do not worry about sentence structure, or grammar, or spelling. "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl" was such a journal. Going back and reading the journal, you can see your

highs and your lows. You can see the progress you have made. You can see how you have grown to depend on the Lord. You may want to write devotions as you go along, or at a later date reread the journal and write devotions. It is very hard to be mad at God if you are writing a devotion praising him. How many of David's Psalms were written when he was mad at God?

Lists

Your friends want to help. There are some who will come in, see something that needs doing, and do it. A majority, however, will ask, "What can I do?" When this question is asked, you may not be able to think of anything for them to do. You may even think, "I've got cancer, and I have to do their thinking for them." There is a solution. Keep a notepad; and when you think of something, just jot it down. You can refer to the list and give assignments. Better yet, you can turn it over to a friend to organize it and pass out assignments. Remember, volunteers want to help, but if you don't help them find an appropriate task, they will sit idle, and you will be expected to entertain them. A friend of ours is Susan's (a lady with both cancer and cerebral palsy) secretary. She writes and organizes Susan's notes and thoughts in a computer – another friend takes care of bill paying – everyone has something to do, but no one is overloaded. By the way, has anyone shined shoes and mowed the lawn? How about taking the cats in for their annual shots? Since doctors' appointments may run late, someone should be on call to pick up children and do all those other things that should be done after the appointment.

Spreading Germs Between People

Out of the mouth proceeds all manner of evil things – bacteria, viruses, fungi....

With some chemotherapy and radiation treatments, your immune system will suffer. You run a greater risk of picking up an infection or a disease with your immune system impaired than when you were completely healthy. As a result, you need some rules to keep the germs at bay – talk to your doctor about which rules are for you. If you as a patient do not establish some rules, there will be no rules.

Even if you establish rules, there are going to be some friends who ignore them. Buy disinfectant wipes by the caseload and use them. While it probably would not be appropriate to ask them to read Leviticus 7 through 11 (nearly every verse uses the word unclean), you can picture what their reaction would be if you did. Just thinking about it should improve your mood.

If you have a severely-impaired immune system, a kiss on your cheek leaves filthy germs. You can wipe a hand across your cheek and wash the germs into the mucus membrane around your eyes or mouth. Mucus membranes are an ideal place for the germs to start building their foothold in your body. Protect yourself.

Shaking hands can be just about as bad. Germs are transferred from one individual to another. Then from the hand they are transferred to the mucus membrane of the eyes or mouth. By the way, if a doctor has to wash his hands for 15 minutes before putting on sterile gloves, how effective is the quick hand-washing we all do after a trip to the restroom? How often do we

wash our hands after sneezing into them? We are not suggesting you have people wash their hands for 15 minutes before they visit you – we’re just trying to illustrate the possible threat. Some healthy people do not shake hands during the “cold season” because they do not want to pick up someone else’s germs.

A hug where both parties touch cloth is much more sanitary than a kiss or a handshake.

After the visitor leaves, if your immune system is compromised, wash the germs off your hands, or better yet wash the germs off while your visitor is still there, so they can grasp that the matter is very serious. You do not want to pick up germs from your perfectly-healthy friends; and if you discuss it with them, they probably do not want you to pick them up either.

Also, with your immune system compromised, some natural bacteria can become infectious. Maybe you should tell your friends that you need to protect them from your super germs.

Spreading Germs on Surfaces

Probably the most contaminated item in a house is a dishrag. A dishrag is usually more contaminated than the toilet bowl. We move that dishrag over the counter tops and tables to clean them. Anyone who comes in contact with the tables and counter tops can pick up germs. From a sanitary standpoint, it would be better to lick the areas clean. That just sounds disgusting, even if you are a good cook. If you use a dishcloth, either use a disposable one, or zap it on high for 45 seconds in the microwave after each use.

Food

Food will come, whether you ask for it or not. Hopefully, any dishes that need to be returned are appropriately marked. Even though you know that the green casserole dish came from Aunt Sally, you may forget when you see 15 similar dishes on your counter top waiting to be returned.

Food has a shelf life. If your immune system is impaired by chemo, you do not want to risk food poisoning. Date every item of food in the refrigerator. Add to the list of things to do an item of ensuring that no outdated food remains in the refrigerator. If the volunteer in charge of the refrigerator cannot stand to throw the food away, let him encourage others to dine with you so that the food gets eaten immediately. Or, if you have a freezer, some dishes can be frozen for later use.

Identify your comfort foods. Baked or mashed potatoes may be one. Broccoli is good (good for you and contains lots of iron). Fat, especially beef and pork, can lead to nausea. Kiwi tastes good and is full of vitamins and minerals. As you eat different foods, note your reaction to them. One of your volunteers can spread the word that beef and pork fat cause you to become nauseous and that you love mashed potatoes with some margarine and no gravy.

Good nutrition is important to help your body fight infections, and the cancer itself. You may find your chemo or radiation treatments affect your sense(s) of smell and/or taste. One woman relates that when her father, a red meat lover, was undergoing chemo, he would become

absolutely nauseated by the smell of meat cooking, and eating it was out of the question. Some people undergoing chemo report strange cravings – often for food they would never have eaten before the treatments. The bottom line is, while a “balanced diet” is important, eating foods your body will accept and tolerate makes a lot of sense. Do check with your doctor to determine if there are any foods you should avoid based on your chemo or other medications he may have prescribed, and if there are foods he would recommend you try.

Beverages that you love may no longer taste good. Beverages that you are not fond of may suddenly taste better. Experiment. You need to keep your liquid level up.

Dental Care

Go to the dentist, tell him/her you will be starting chemo, and get your teeth cleaned and checked, as well as any un-postponable dental work done, before chemo starts. Chemo reduces our ability to fight off infection, including dental infection. The teeth cleaning and checkup will help you have your teeth when the chemo is over. The gums can be a major route for infections to enter your body.

While you are at it, go to your general practitioner and get a flu shot, and talk about a pneumonia vaccine.

Mouth Sores

With some chemo, your mouth will dry out. With a dry mouth, sores are more likely to develop. With an impaired immune system, the sores may not heal by themselves, and infections may set in. With your white blood cell count low, the bacteria in the sores can multiply rapidly. Even if you have just a little sore, let your doctor know. He may be able to furnish you with a topical anesthetic to apply to the sores. Nowadays, most are quite pleasant tasting.

Partner in Treatment

You need to be an active partner with your doctor in your treatment. He does not know how the different medicines impact you unless you tell him. Judy was allergic to Compazine, an anti-nausea medication. With the first chemo, we thought the problems were natural reactions to the chemo. As things deteriorated after her second dose of Compazine, we finally called the doctor. He was not available, but his calls were being referred to another doctor. His instructions were, “You can’t wait for EMS. Give her Benadryl.” The replacement for the Compazine was much more expensive, but it did not have the side effects.

We hope no one has an experience like that. Having open communication with your doctor will help prevent such a problem.

Treatments are more effective if you have a positive attitude. You are more likely to have a positive attitude if you are a partner in developing your treatment plan.

If you fully understand the treatment plan and the reasons behind the treatment plan, you are

more likely to follow it; and if you have to deviate, you are more likely to let your doctor know.

Fatigue

Chemo tires you out. With each dose of chemo, it tires you out a little more, and you don't recover completely prior to the next round. Have a meal ready to eat at home after each chemo treatment. That way, if you are too tired to prepare a meal, you have one ready to eat. You may do like Judy did when Dorothy was driving her home from chemo – they would stop at a restaurant and eat while visiting with each other.

Set Realistic Goals

If you set a goal that you are going to put in a full week's work but are exhausted when you get to work on Monday morning, maybe you are setting an unrealistic goal. When Judy had cancer, we set a goal of getting ready and trying to make it to church. We got halfway there before we turned around and went home. We did not make it to church, but we met a very realistic goal for that week. Later we not only made it to church but stayed for Bible Class. Sometimes standing up with help is a realistic goal. Never quit – remember, God does not give us any challenge we cannot face with His help.

Keep On With Your Life As Much As You Can

Cancer changes your life. Cancer changes your family's life. That having been said, try to keep "your life" or lifestyle as normal as you can. If you go to a family reunion every other year, go if you can, even if you have to spend the time in bed with the relatives coming in to visit with you. With almost all portions of your life, you will have to make some adjustments, but if you abandon being you and if you abandon keeping the family traditions, you are admitting defeat. Sometimes the willpower to keep on with your life is what gives you the motivation to fight the cancer.

Focus On The Positive

If you listen to people tell you that you are going to die or that God is punishing you for some failure on your part, you will begin to believe it. Some people, especially older people, feel ashamed that cancer has invaded their family. On a logical level, they understand there is nothing to be ashamed of, but this is on an emotional level. (2 Timothy 2:23)

Many children see themselves as the cause of the parent's illness. That is a very heavy burden for a child to bear.

Medical databases can give misleading information. We know a young lady whose parents were informed that the medical database for their daughter's cancer had 17 patients in it. All had died. She was number 18 and survived because of what had been learned by the doctors treating the other 17. Cancer treatment is advancing faster than politicians change their positions.

Well over half of the information available on the information superhighway is wrong or

misleading. Others tell me that over 90% of the information is wrong. You can learn that liver flukes cause all cancers, or that eating anything besides pureed raw fruits and vegetables will lead to cancer. You can learn that you should tell your doctor to stop treatment and that you can cure yourself with a food blender and raw vegetables. Spend time on the Internet learning about your variety of cancer, but focus on the sites that are legitimate.

Sites like the American Cancer Society.

Also focus on Journal Articles that are peer-reviewed.

Matthew 7:15-20 talks about false prophets. Consider the purveyors of misinformation as false prophets. As an illustration about how skewed information can be, go to www.DHMO.org. This is a tongue-in-cheek website about water (chemical name dihydrogen monoxide). It even talks about the connection between water and cancer. Be ready for a laugh when you read it. In fact, have a friend present, and read and laugh together. After reading this site, there are people who have written their Congressmen to ban DHMO.

If you have questions about something you read or found on the Internet, ask your doctor. Judge everything you learn on the Internet by the information found in www.cancer.com, www.cancer.net, and www.cancer.gov.

Uplifting Music

Listening to uplifting music can improve your spirit. While much that is on TV can occupy time, much of it is not uplifting. Some people like to listen to water flowing in a creek, or the surf. Find what is uplifting and use it. With music, you can go to sleep with it on and wake up with it on.

Reading

Now is the perfect time to catch up on your reading. Keep several things available to read. Something light and something more serious. Select your reading to match your mood at the moment.

Humor

It may seem like a strange time to want to laugh. But medical studies have shown that laughter (the real stuff, not the polite type) can be beneficial to you. It has been shown to reduce the need for pain medication. It can help reduce the strength of medicinal side effects. It lowers blood pressure. It provides an emotional release and helps you look at your situation more objectively. It's better for you than the alternative. It promotes a sense of well-being. It helps break the tension of the situation when people realize that they don't have to be sad for you all the time. If you can laugh in your situation, it must be okay for them, too.

Our friend Joe, who is a nurse, told us about a patient he once cared for after open-heart surgery. She was overdue to be discharged, but had a persistent low-grade fever. Her family tip-toed

around her like she might break if they touched her. He was showing them how they could use a pillow to help her when she coughed. Well, Joe said something, probably something inadvertent, which is not unusual for him. She burst out laughing and, of course, started coughing. After a few more good laughs with the family, and the pillow they held on her chest, she cleared her lungs of the mucus plug that was causing the fever. She went home the next afternoon. So have some of your old favorite comedy movies, books, cartoons, or recordings on hand to give your morale and your body a boost.

Dr. Blumhardt leaves two books by Christine Clifford, MD (a cancer survivor), in her chemo room. They are Not Now...I'm Having a No Hair Day and Our Family Has Cancer, Too. They are small and easy to read.

Moods (Proverbs 18:14)

As time passes, you have moments when you are scared. Moments when you are bored. Moments when you feel lost. Is it any wonder that your mood varies? Added to that, many drugs taken during cancer treatment can impact your moods. There is a tendency to take these moods out on those closest to you. When you find that you snap at those close to you, hunt for a way to control those moods. It may be music. It may be writing in a journal, or a long walk. A long walk, depending on your condition, may be a few feet or a few miles. A friend of ours, a nurse who at one time administered chemotherapy treatments, relates that one of her patients, when feeling “out of control” had a unique way of “letting it out.” She would wait for her family to leave in the morning, then she would turn on the radio or stereo as loud as it would go (to keep the neighbors from thinking she was totally crazy) and would scream at the top of her lungs, “I hate you, cancer! Get out of my life.” A little odd, but it worked for her. The closer you can keep your life like it always was, the easier it is to control mood swings.

Mood Lifters

Have you thought of having a chemo shower? Like a baby shower, but with hats, scarves, and lotions. Games such as “Throw Away The Razor.”

Have a friend make “cancer sucks” hats for the patient, her nurses, and her friends.

Don't Plan On Your Funeral

While you may want to save your loved ones the trouble of planning your funeral, consider your reasons. If planning your funeral is a sign that you are giving up, don't do it. If you give up, the cancer has won. Remember to try to stay on the positive side of things.

When this document was in draft form, a friend read the original version of the above statement and stated that there are many people who in the normal course of their lives plan their funerals, make wills, etc. These people should continue doing what they normally would do.

Hospice Care

When you and your medical professionals see little benefit of aggressive anti-cancer treatment or if they think the treatment is too risky, Hospice Care is often instituted. You will find caring and knowledgeable people who can help you keep living as normally as possible. We know people who improved when placed in Hospice Care. Also, if you decide that you have been through enough and you elect to stop treatment, feel free to do so. If you become involved in Hospice Care, use the time for living and fill that time with good memories.

Cancer in Children

When cancer attacks children, the impact on the parents is often worse than if they had the disease themselves. A friend states that when a child has cancer, it is extremely important to minister to the whole family. She states that she wishes now that she could have spent more time with her other children. At the time, she and her husband were overwhelmed and just did what they could.

To this day, the children remember business trips that the husband went on and took his children with him, as high points.

When the American Cancer Society or a cancer treatment hospital has a party for the children with cancer, they always include the siblings.

Our friend Ann writes, “One of the things that comes to mind to me deals with children, primarily since Cathy was just 8/9 during the 15 months between the time Rene’s colon cancer re-emerged in his liver, and his death. We tried to be as honest as possible with her – I had the experience as a 13 year old when my father’s heart attack was hidden from me – and was terribly ashamed and upset when asked how he was recovering from it.

“We tried to keep a positive, hopeful atmosphere in our home, and we also tried to keep her life and activities as normal as possible – that indeed is where the friends come in – enlist them to transport/entertain, etc. – most were grateful for a way to help – I still have a big spot in my heart for those who looked out for her as well!

“Another concern is for preteens/young teenagers – they are very vulnerable to an apparent lack of concern/being ignored – I know of two young ladies who made some very bad choices for attention and affection from male companions and added unexpected grandchildren and unwed teen mothers to the mix.”

Insurance

Hopefully you have good insurance coverage and hopefully you will not have problems getting all treatments paid for. That being said, if an insurance company can delay a payment for a day, they can earn interest on that payment for a day. While a day’s interest on \$200.00 is not much, when you do it for 100,000 customers for 6 weeks, it becomes serious money. These delays can take many forms, from denial of a claim, to sending out a form asking if you have other

insurance coverage. Yes, that same form you filled out and sent in with the last dozen claims! Each time a delay occurs; just remember it is a game they are playing to earn extra money. Never accept a denial of a claim, but don't let it bother you. It's just a macabre game they are playing, and you don't want to let them win. Keep your doctor informed about these games the insurance people are playing.

Conclusion

Cancer changes your life. As our friend Jan says, "I was just 19 when I had thyroid cancer. Fortunately it was discovered before it spread. I waited 11 years before I had a kid. I had checkups for 25 years before I got tired of them. But, I have always had my paperwork in order and each kid's graduation was a milestone for me, starting in nursery school.

"We travel a lot now, almost once a month. So, I pay all bills in advance, keep my closets cleaned out, and sleep well when I am gone. Those are all lessons I learned from my experience. I do not want to leave any unfinished business for my heirs or survivors."

You will find that cancer will change you in ways that you did not anticipate – many of those changes will be very positive.

In conclusion, there are no right answers or wrong answers. There are just answers that work for you.

Thank You

We wish to thank our support group and the others who read this manuscript and helped us improve it. It would not have been completed without their help.

Web Edition

We are making arrangements to post “**Cancer – An Intense House Guest**” and “**We Heard the Wings of Angels**” (a booklet of 32 devotions for cancer patients and their families) on the Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church web site. The documents will be set up for printing on 8.5” X 11” paper.

www.shlutheran.org

The Next Edition

If you have anything you feel should be added to the next edition, please do not hesitate to send it to us.

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Printing Booklet Format

Some people just love to have a booklet, rather than several sheets of paper stapled together. If you would like to print copies of “**Cancer – An Intense House Guest**” and/or “**We Heard the Wings of Angels**” in booklet form, we can help. We have both documents in WordPerfect format, so you can print them in booklet form. If you do not have access to WordPerfect, we can send you Print Masters. Contact Judy or Herb Nordmeyer. By doing this you will be helping get these documents distributed to the people who need them.