

## ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

Hello and welcome to the **LET'S TALK** ..... NEWSLETTER! Your Cancer CareCenter team has gotten together to provide a bi-monthly newsletter to help keep you up to date with the latest knowledge, programs and happenings in the cancer world. Our newsletter is dedicated to cancer prevention, wellness and treatment. But the most important thing about "our newsletter" is that it is "your newsletter"!!!!!! Our hope is that this will provide you an increased opportunity to become an active participant in your health and cancer treatment plan. Happy reading!

## 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.

## STAYING POSITIVE

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

Although it is difficult at times, it is important to stay positive. This is not just advice for people living with chronic illness ..... but everyone! Negative thinking is expensive. It drags us down mentally, emotionally, and physically. You can no longer afford the luxury of a negative thought. It's time to change that "stinkin' thinkin'". It is time to "lighten up".

- Be easier on yourself
- Think better of yourself
- Learn to forgive yourself and others
- Spend more time focusing on the positive
- Spend less time thinking negatively
- Enjoy each moment



Every good thought you think is contributing its share to the ultimate result of your life.

-Grenville Kleiser

## MAMMOGRAPHY SAVES LIVES

*Written by Linda Stickelmeyer, RN, OCN*

It's true, mammograms can save lives. Breast cancer found early by mammography, when it is too small to be felt gives a person a chance of cure. Mammography should be done close to the time of or after a physical exam by your doctor. A mammogram is either a screening mammogram (no signs of a problem or any symptoms) or a diagnostic mammogram (symptom or a sign of something not normal in your breast).

Screening should start yearly after the age of 40. A baseline exam should be done between the ages 35-40. A baseline exam will be used as a comparison for future mammograms. If a first-degree relative had breast cancer at any early age perhaps your baseline will be earlier. A small percentage of breast cancers (10-15%) are not discovered on mammograms, even if you can feel something different in your breasts. You should alert your physician to anything "different". If your mammogram shows nothing but you think something is not as it has been, don't let it go. Become familiar with how your breasts feel so you know when there is a change. Yearly breast exams by a physician, monthly self breast exam and yearly mammograms after the age of 40 or as indicated still afford you the best chance of finding a potential problem early.

## SPIRITUAL HELP IS A CALL AWAY

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

It is not unusual for patients with cancer to struggle with questions like "why me" or "what did I do to deserve this?" Or maybe they find themselves thinking about their own death and dying for the first time. Spiritual struggles such as these are every bit as important and upsetting as some of the physical problems you may encounter with your cancer diagnosis. At Forum Health we understand the impact that spiritual distress can have on your life. We want you to know that ministers and volunteers are available to help you work through spiritual concerns. Whether you have a life long belief in God or are thinking about religious possibilities for the first time, Pastoral Services at Forum Health are just a phone call away. Ask your nurse to help you contact them.

## **NEUTROPENIA: WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT AFFECT ME?**

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

**Neutropenia** means that you have a low white blood cell count. More specifically, neutropenia refers to a low number of a certain type of white blood cells called “neutrophils.” **Neutrophils** protect you from infection. When you have a low number of white blood cells and neutrophils, you are at a higher than normal risk for developing an infection and becoming sick.

Neutrophils are made in your bone marrow and work by going to your bloodstream and attacking any invading germs. This helps keep you from becoming sick. After chemotherapy and during radiation therapy, your bone marrow is injured for a short time. During this time, the bone marrow is not functioning well and is not making enough neutrophils to fight off the germs that cause you to become sick. If you have neutropenia, you may feel generally tired and achy.

Neutropenia is the most common and expected side effect of cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy. Your neutrophils are at their lowest point at about 7 to 14 days after receiving **chemotherapy** and generally return to a normal level 21 to 28 days after chemotherapy. If you are receiving **radiation therapy**, your neutrophils may become low at any time during treatment and usually return to normal within a few days to a week of stopping treatment.

Monitoring for neutropenia is very important as you go through cancer treatment. Blood will be drawn at regular intervals to check many components or elements of your blood. If your white blood cells and neutrophils are low, your doctor or nurse will notify you and instruct you on symptoms of an infection to report back to them.

**Symptoms** of an infection include a temperature of 101° or higher, shaking chills, flu-like symptoms, pain in a certain area of your body, redness around or drainage from a wound, sore throat or mouth, cough or shortness of breath, diarrhea or loose stools, difficulty or burning with urination, vaginal discharge, and general tiredness or body aches.

If your neutrophil and white blood cell counts are low, there are things you can do to protect yourself. **Protective measures** include frequent and regular handwashing, your first and best defense against infection. Keep your skin, mouth, and teeth clean. Protect your skin from scrapes and cuts. Clean and cook all foods well (see “Low Microbial Diet” article in this issue). Drink plenty of fluids. Avoid constipation. Stay out of crowds and away from large groups of people. Avoid being around people who are sick and those who have an infection. Check with your

before getting any vaccinations and before having dental work done. Wear gloves when washing dishes and gardening. Ask someone else to clean up after pets to avoid inhaling germs.

If you have any questions or concerns about neutropenia or any treatment side effect, ask your Cancer CareCenter doctor or nurse.

## **LOW MICROBIAL DIET**

*Written by Debbie Gilbert, MS, RD, LD*

A low microbial diet should be followed when your neutrophil and /or white blood cell count is low. This diet includes the following:

### **AVOID**

- raw vegetables and vegetable garnishes
- cold salads, potato salad, macaroni salad (due to raw vegetables)
- dried fruits unless in baked goods
- fresh squeezed juices
- fresh fruits-unless it has heavy skin and fruit is washed before peeling
- rare or medium-rare cooked meats
- raw eggs unpasteurized cheese or milk

### **ALWAYS**

- wash and cook your food well
- wash your hands before eating or handling food
- do not share cups or utensils with others
- throw out food /liquids that have been partially eaten or opened

## **KNOWLEDGE IS KEY**

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

There is no question that being diagnosed with cancer puts you on a very personal journey and instills many questions in your mind. One of the best weapons to help you deal with this diagnosis is accurate information. You probably have already received a “Diagnosis Packet”. The information in this packet is designed to give you a better understanding and assist you in coping with your illness in a positive way. The Cancer CareCenter has other print material that maybe helpful to you. Feel free to call us and we will assist you as best we can. This print information is not meant to replace your healthcare team, but acts to aid in helping you.

## **HOW DO WE COPE...LET US SHARE THE WAYS**

*Written by Cathy Kajut, MSW, LSW*

Families sharing ideas might help another family cope with the maze of stresses that cancer can inflict upon them.

This tip is on calming down the frenzies of the financial maze of medical bills. Consider the following "recipe" to deal with those stacks of bills and avoiding "I can't deal with this now" reaction.

1. Ask a family member or friend to be your "Bill Buddy". He or she will review with you bills or inquires are sent to you, and will help you with necessary responses in a timely fashion. Talk with your Oncology Social Worker for additional assistance in this area also.
2. Put all your medical bills into a three ring binder as soon as you receive them and schedule a time to review them with your Bill Buddy. On each bill, put the date you received it and the name of the person you spoke with about it and what was stated or agreed upon, and if you need to contact them or someone else about it further.

In the binder, keep the following items (hide them from the "home work borrower") always available: paper punch, paper, pens, highlighter markers, stamped envelopes, paper clips, pencil and eraser

3. In the first section of your binder keep:
  - your insurance information,
  - copy of your insurance card and the contact person for the company
  - doctors' names, addresses and phone numbers
  - information on any organizations that may be assisting you financially.

If you have any tips pass them on to your Social Worker or your nurse.

## **SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMS**

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

Guess what? **I CAN COPE**, our four to six week support and educational series will be available to you by teleconferencing method. In other words, you can participate in **I CAN COPE** in the comfort of your home via the telephone. For more information, or to register, call (330) 740-4152.

## **SOCIAL WORK WORKS**

*Written by Mary Morris, MSED, LSW, CCM*

The CancerCare Center has Social Workers available to assist you, on an in- and outpatient basis and as a family member, with the myriad of concerns that may arise from the diagnosis and treatment. Your Social Worker can assist with financial concerns, counseling, providing information, discharge planning, advanced directives, referrals to community agencies, and on an as needed basis. They can be contacted as follows:

*At Trumbull Memorial Hospital:*

Mary Handzlik, BA, LSW  
(330) 841-9052

*At Tod Childrens' Hospital:*

Cathy Kajut, MSW, LSW  
(330) 740-4190 Pager (330) 640-0962

*At Northside Medical Center:*

Mary C. Morris, MSED, LSW, CCM  
(330) 740-4189 Pager (330) 640-1884

## **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

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

If you or your loved one has cancer, you don't have to feel alone. There are many support groups and programs that allow you to share your feelings and meet others who share the same concerns and challenges. Our hope is that these programs will provide encouragement, education, support and an opportunity to become empowered and take an active role in your treatment. Be sure to take a look at the calendar of activities.



I can stand what I know. It is what I don't know that frightens me.

-Frances Newton

