



YOUR EMOTIONS DURING TREATMENT: TIPS AND EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is intended to give some simple information on the kind of emotions you may feel or have experienced after discovering your illness. A diagnosis of cancer can be considered a critical event in the life of any individual and that is why there are many and different emotional reactions. Right now you need to take care of your body but you also need to take care of your emotions. In dealing with this disease, your physical health can suffer a repercussion that can also upset your emotions, the ability to relate to what you like to do or think.

EMOTIONS

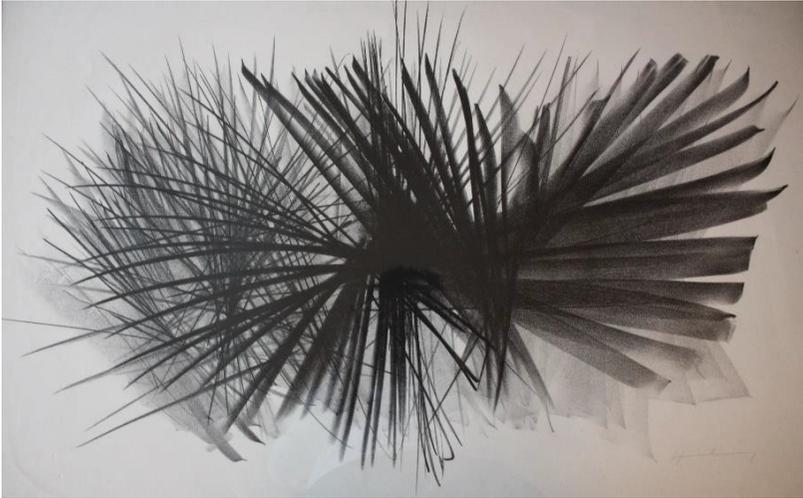
For each of us, facing cancer is an extremely subjective experience, and the feelings, emotions and fears that can be experienced are different from person to person. The values you grew up with will influence the way you handle the situation in the face of the disease. Your character and the way you deal with difficulties in general will influence the way you handle the situation. Some people may feel that they are strong enough to protect their friends and families from the worry of the disease. Others seek the support of loved ones or that of those who have already been through it or help themselves with faith. Some find the help of psychologists and others outside the family. Whatever you decide, it's important to do what's right for you and not compare yourself to others.

Emotions such as anger, fear, guilt can take the form of anxious (insomnia, agitation, difficulty concentrating) and/or depressive symptoms (loss of appetite, apathy, low mood), with concerns about, for example, changes in body image ("...but will my hair grow back?"), the management of stress deriving from hospital times ("the only commitments I have are visits and the times when I have to take medicine"), difficulty planning the future ("I don't know yet when I can go back to work").

It is completely normal and understandable to experience these feelings, which are useful for the person to get rid of states of inner emotional tension.

Living in uncertainty is part of this pathway but fighting means learning to live with this uncertainty typical of those who have cancer. An effective fight depends, in part, on maintaining self-confidence and in particular on the belief that you will be able to cope with the daily challenges of the disease.

We will now list some of these common feelings that patients have experienced during treatment and some practical tips on how to manage these feelings.



ANGER

Anger is one of the many common emotional reactions you may feel after you get sick; it can be directed against doctors, because, for example, you hold them responsible for something related to your illness, but this emotion can also affect family members or friends. It is possible that since you got sick you have generally become restless, irritable and sometimes even intolerant in general.

Sometimes, you may even feel envious of someone who is fine and seems to have no worries. This is also a common emotional reaction and there is no reason to be ashamed of it. You can also be angry with God, with life, with yourself.

You may unwittingly blame those around you regardless of their behaviour: usually this anger is not actually directed at those who become its target; the point is that you feel the arrival of this disease as a great injustice, your life project is threatened, you feel that everything goes into a state of "suspension", you can feel that the goals you have set for yourself in life will no longer be able to be reached.

This is the moment when you can more easily ask yourself "*why me?*"

Like all emotions, anger is never right or wrong: it exists, and you need to acknowledge it, understand it, and manage it the best you can.

Repressing the manifestations of anger is harmful to psychophysical health, venting violently by expressing your anger is harmful to your relationships. Swallowing anger hurts as well as shouting it:

What can you do if you feel angry?

- Listen to your anger and try to understand its message
- If you are in the midst of an overly heated conflict, "change the mood" by physically or mentally moving away from the relationship for a moment
- Relieve tension with physical activities: play sports if you can, join in cheering on your favourite team, do manual work, etc.
- If you feel contracted, it may be useful to have a massage and/or use relaxation techniques.
- Use your anger as fuel for something positive (hug your child tightly instead of sending your wife to hell)
- If you feel that all this is not enough, try to contact a psychologist because it may be useful to work more deeply on your discomfort to get better

FEAR

It is normal to feel worried during the treatment when you are waiting for the results of some tests and in general about how things could go. In the same way, after the treatment, it is normal to have the concern that the cancer will return. Any symptom can become a source of concern for you and it can be automatically traced back to the tumour. Feeling the emotion of fear is very frequent and common in all people who are affected by cancer. For some people, the fear is so strong that they can no longer enjoy life.

Sleeping well, eating well, or even going to check-ups becomes difficult.

"If I have it again, what should I do?"

One woman said: *"I never thought I'd make it the first time."*

Of course, not everyone reacts in the same way. One patient admitted, "[cancer] is only part of life, and besides, I always manage to keep hope."

If you have finished the treatment it is possible that fears will lessen over time. However, even years after treatment, some events can cause concern for your health.

These events may include:

- follow-up visits;
- anniversaries (such as the date you were diagnosed or had surgery or finished treatment);
- birthdays;
 - the illness of a family member;
 - the appearance of symptoms similar to those you had when you discovered that you had cancer;
- the death of someone who had cancer;
- personal reminders. For example, one person said that he used to go to a particular restaurant during the treatment because the milkshakes they served were the only thing he could bear to eat. After the treatment, he found that he avoided going to that restaurant because it reminded him of the treatment and gave him "stomach pain."

TIP - How do you deal with fear?

Here are some ideas that have helped people with cancer cope with fear and feel more confident.

- ***KEEP INFORMED***

Learning about your illness, understanding what can be done to get better, and seeking health services that work for you can give you a great sense of control. In addition, find out about your rights by contacting your doctor or healthcare professional. Some studies also suggest that people who are well informed about their disease and related therapeutic treatments are more aware of their situation and more likely to react positively than others.

- ***EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS OF FEAR, ANGER AND SADNESS***

Being open and dealing with your emotions helps many people feel less worried. Some patients experience this when they express strong feelings such as anger or sadness, and realize that they are able to let go in the face of these feelings.

Some people bring out their emotions by talking to friends and family, other patients or psychologists.

Of course, if you prefer not to talk about the disease with others, you are free not to do so. You can also bring out your feelings by thinking about them or writing them down on a piece of paper.

Thinking or talking about your feelings can be difficult, and some people just want to think about moving on without dwelling on what they are feeling. These people try never to think about their illness and avoid anything that reminds them of it. It is certainly important to look for ways to distract yourself from thoughts about the disease but it is also important not to completely avoid thinking about it. If you realize that cancer is taking over your life, it may be helpful to find a way to express your feelings.

- *IF YOU HAVE A CONCERN, GIVE IT ITS TIME AND THEN DO NOT THINK ABOUT IT ANY MORE*



- *DEVELOP POSITIVE THOUGHTS*

Trying to have positive thoughts can help you cope with life better. Sometimes this means looking for the good side of things even in a difficult situation, or trying to have hope instead of always thinking about the worst.

Use your energy to focus on your well-being and everything you can do now to be as healthy as possible.

Don't blame yourself for your cancer. Some people believe they have become ill with cancer due to something they have done or neglected.

This is generally not true, and therefore resentment should not propagate in this direction. Remember: cancer can come to anyone.

Trying to have positive thoughts doesn't mean being optimistic all the time. Many people say they want to have the freedom to switch off for a while. As one woman said, *"When things get really tough, I just tell my family to have a bad day from cancer. I cancel all my appointments, go up the stairs and go to bed."*

- ***FIND WAYS THAT ALLOW YOU TO RELAX***

Finding time for activities that help you relax is very important in order to feel better. While relaxation is understood as "doing nothing," many people find it difficult to let go, especially if the stress and strain of the day is hard to forget. However, specific relaxation exercises can help reduce tension and "recharge the batteries". Know that the oncology psychologist can easily teach you some relaxation techniques.

- ***BE AS ACTIVE AS YOU CAN***

Getting out of the house and doing something, even when you don't feel like it, can help focus your thoughts on things other than cancer, or the worries it brings. But be careful to respect your need to rest too.

- ***CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN***

Some people say that putting their lives in order makes them feel less worried. Being interested in caring for your health, keeping commitments, and making lifestyle changes are some of the things you can exercise control over. Managing an agenda can also give you more power. And, while not all thoughts can be controlled, some people say they have improved the situation by not focusing on fear, or that they have felt better by not dwelling on the thoughts that are most frightening.

FEELING STRESSED

Since you learned that you have cancer, you may have started to worry about family, work or money. These stressful thoughts can emerge especially when you are tired and you feel that there is really too much to bear. Many patients also think that stress played a key role in the onset of their disease. It is important to remember that the exact cause of many cancers is not known to date. No research has shown that stress causes cancer, although stress can have an influence on your mental and physical health. It is clear, however, that finding a way to reduce or control the stress in your life can certainly help you feel better.

- **STRESS REDUCTION**

Many have recognized that activities such as those described below are helpful in addressing their cancer concerns. Ask your doctor, nurse, psychologist to take part in these activities.

Exercises: Exercises are a known method for reducing stress and being less tense, regardless of whether you have cancer or not. As one man said: *"I can feel a little down, and what separates me from depression is a fine line, but when I walk for 45 or 50 minutes in the open air, I sometimes feel the master of the world."*

Consult your doctors before exercising, and be careful not to tire yourself too much. If you can't walk, ask for other types of exercises that may be helpful.

- **DANCE AND MOVEMENTS**

People can express their cancer-induced emotions using different types of body movements.

Some people can express their emotions by dancing.



SHARE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Telling and hearing life stories of people who have or have had cancer can help you learn to solve and share problems, be more confident, find meaning in everything you are doing. Know that in the hospital there is a group aimed at cancer patients where you can discuss the different strategies used by others to improve their quality of life.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

You may feel angry, tense and sad while being treated. For most people, these feelings fade over time. For 25% of patients, however, these emotions can become severe. If you should feel that these emotions reach such an intensity as to interfere excessively with your daily life, being almost always present during the day, it would be advisable to evaluate the possibility of carrying out an interview with a psychologist, who can help you to better define your state emotional and to understand how to better manage your daily life. Your doctor can also prescribe medications to help you feel less tense and worried.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

During the treatment, there are several emotional needs that a cancer patient can express more or less explicitly. You can often choose not to talk about it openly with family members, either because you are afraid of worrying them or because, at times, you prefer to act like nothing has happened. Asking for psychological and oncological support means having a space dedicated to you together with a person professionally prepared and available to talk about any topic, even the most difficult. Having a tumour also means having to make important decisions. The space for interviews with a psycho-oncologist can provide you with the opportunity to evaluate the possible costs and benefits of a given treatment and the possibility of making new requests for information to the oncologist, to try to resolve medical doubts.

- *IF I GO TO A PSYCHOLOGIST, DOES IT MEAN I AM A MENTALLY ILL?*

Even today, those who turn to a psychologist or a psychiatrist are considered, according to a commonly widespread prejudice, as a person with serious psychological problems.

This is not the case: if you go to a psycho-oncologist simply means that you need help to cope with the difficult situations that the disease puts you in front of.

Seeking support is a sign of strength: it means that you have recognized your difficulties and have decided to do something to try to solve them.

- *HOW LONG CAN A PATHWAY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT LAST?*

There is no set duration for a psychological support intervention.

Based on the question and needs that emerge during the interviews, the psychologist agrees with you the hypothetical pathway and establishes the frequency of the meetings (weekly, fortnightly, etc.) and their duration. Consider that the overall duration of a psychological support pathway is generally limited and concomitant with the moment of discomfort and crisis you are experiencing.

- ***ARE PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS DANGEROUS? ARE THEY USELESS IF I ALREADY GO TO A PSYCHONCOLOGIST?***

Another fairly widespread prejudice concerns the intake of psychotropic drugs.

People often associate the words addiction, habit-formation, severity with these drugs. In reality there are moments in which the psychotropic drug can be very useful in helping the person to re-establish an emotional and psychic balance that allows them to face everyday life. In this way, the support intervention agreed with the psycho-oncologist is also more productive and effective. However, it is important to contact specialists such as a psychiatrist or neurologist for prescribing these drugs, who are constantly updated on the best treatments to be performed in individual cases.

- ***HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED SPECIALIST SUPPORT?***

If symptoms such as difficulty concentrating, insomnia, inappetence, constant intrusive thoughts, uncontrollable fears or worries, persist for more than a few weeks or affect most of your day, it may be appropriate to contact a psycho-oncologist to evaluate the usefulness of undertaking a psychological pathway.

MEASURE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOMFORT

Is it possible to measure psychological distress?

Although psychological distress represents a highly subjective experience, psychosocial research in this area has developed some questionnaires capable of quantifying this important aspect.

If you are interested in an evaluation of your psychological distress you can simply request a visit with the psychologist who will ask you to fill in some simple and short questionnaires.

These tools are easy to fill in and will provide you with a "snapshot" of your current psychological situation and together with the psychologist you can reflect on your current strengths and weaknesses concerning the disease.



CHANGES IN MEMORY

It is possible that since you got sick you have noticed that you have some problems related to memory and concentration, and these could be due to:

- ✓ chemotherapy / radiotherapy
- ✓ other medicines
- ✓ anxiety/depression
- ✓ age
- ✓ menopause
- ✓ other

- *IMPROVE MEMORY AND CONCENTRATION.*

Patients have found several ways to help improve memory after treatments. See if some of these ideas might be useful to you:

- keep a notebook or a diary and use them to plan your day. You can write down each goal, how long it will last and where you will need to go. Plan the whole day including the evening as well. Keep your diary in order and be realistic about what you can do in a day;
- scatter notes around the house to remind you what to do. Use them to remind you to 1) take out the trash and 2) lock the door - only use two or three tickets. If you have too many, you may forget them;
- group long numbers (such as phone numbers and codes) into blocks. For example, the telephone number 812-5846 can be divided as "eight-twelve, fifty-eight, forty-six";
- talk to yourself about what you need to do to help you or stay focused. When you make a note with a number of things to do, such as cooking or working on the computer, repeat everything to yourself;
- learn relaxation techniques. Learning how to relax can help you stay calm even in stressful situations. Better controlling stress can improve memory and attention;
- before dealing with family events or going to business meetings it is practical to repeat the important information you want to remember, such as names, dates and goals you want to achieve;
- repeat what you want to remember. Say it a couple of times, it can help your mind keep the information.

BODY CHANGES

Some bodily changes are short-term, others last forever. However, the effects of treatments can profoundly affect those people who face cancer. You may feel ashamed or worried about someone else's rejection. You may be worried that some "accident" will happen that may embarrass you.

Some persons worry that the people they come into contact with will notice the effects of treatments such as hair loss, scarring on the head and neck, skin colour changes, weight gain or loss.

But even if the treatment isn't visible, your bodily changes can upset you. Feelings of anger are natural.

Your body has changed and with it your sense of yourself. Negative feelings about your body can also diminish your charm, and the reduction or loss of sexual activity can make you feel even worse.

"Psychologically, it was strange" says one patient, *"you are concerned about your masculinity. It is a reflex thought ... but always present"*. It also happens to women, *"I felt like a half woman"* says a patient in a note.

Changes in your physical appearance can be hard for even your loved ones to accept, and this can be hard for you too. Parents and grandparents often worry about how they look to a child or grandchild. They fear that the changes in their body may scare the baby or change the way they are around them.

- ***TIP: ADDRESS BODY CHANGES***

How do you cope with changes in your body? Here are some ideas that have helped some patients:

- if you discover that your skin has changed colour due to radiation, ask your doctor or nurse to find out how to treat the skin and if the colour will change over time.

- find new ways to improve your appearance. A new haircut, changing hair colour, putting on makeup, changing clothing can give you a boost.

- take care and try to familiarize yourself with your scars. If you allow someone to see them will help you see that there is nothing you should be ashamed of.

- tell yourself you're worth more than your tumour. Know that you are worth it, no matter how you look or what happens in your life.
- mourn your losses (after the operation you can feel that you have lost a part of you). They are real, and you have the right to cry!
- focus on the things that made you stronger in dealing with cancer, also making you wiser and more realistic.



YOUR SOCIAL RELATIONS

"My husband works a lot of hours... He didn't know there was a dishwasher, a washing machine, or any of that, and I really couldn't count on him during that time. Somehow I felt bad." Robin, patient, 56 years old.

Your personal relationships can change as a result of the illness. It is normal to notice changes in the way you relate to your family, friends and other people around you every day and in the way they approach you.

This section discusses some of the issues that patients face in relation to family members, boyfriends, friends and co-workers.

- *PROBLEMS WITH YOUR FAMILY*

During or after treatment you may face problems with your family. For example, if you took care of your home or garden prior to treatment, you may find these jobs too strenuous to handle. Family members who have supported you may think that you are back exactly as before the illness and that with the same strength you can go back to doing what you did before at home. As a result, you may get angry that you don't find the support you need.

Quite the opposite, at other times it may happen that you feel well enough to be able to face what you did before, but that your loved ones almost prevent you from doing what you want. You would like to feel useful and try as much as possible to do the things you used to.

Even these attitudes of excessive apprehension on the part of your family and/or friends could annoy you and make you feel more that you are or have been sick, just when you try to think about it as little as possible. However, be careful to resume daily activities always following the doctor's tips.

"I think some marriages grow stronger during illness. We've had our tough times, but we've never taken ourselves for granted."

Daniele, patient with multiple myeloma, 74 years old.

Other times, you expect more from your family than you later receive. They let you down, and they can even make you sick. For one patient, it was the lack of support from a family member during treatment. "Never a visit, not a postcard, not a phone call, and looking back I realized that I had a really difficult time."

You may have always been someone who usually cares about others, but right now you may be the one who needs to ask others for help. You may resent and get angry with those who are just trying to help you and you may have the impression of being pitied. You may not know how to talk to your children or grandchildren about cancer.

When treatment ends, families are often not prepared for the fact that recovery takes time. In general, the recovery will be much longer than the treatment done. Patients often say they didn't realize how long it took to recover. This can lead to disappointment, worry and frustration for everyone. It is not easy to realize that some family dynamics may have changed due to the disease. Help may therefore be needed to cope with the changes and ensure that the "new" family does not collapse.

- *SUPPORT FOR YOUR FAMILIES*

Some of your family members may have reacted with difficulty to the change

related to the disease. It is possible that your partner may have difficulty sleeping and accepting what happened. Even your children can experience changes in their behaviour and therefore express difficulties, especially if they are young. Your family can solve these problems on their own, or they may consider seeking help from an expert for support. Within the Oncology Department, you can find psychologists and psychotherapists who are experienced in the management of these problems who can also guarantee your family members psychological support and also teach them relaxation techniques.

Many times even just a few orientation interviews are enough to better manage the situation without the need to face a real psychotherapy.

- *TIP: FAMILY MATTERS*

How do you cope with family problems? Here are some ideas that have helped some patients cope with family problems:

- let your family know what to expect from you regarding the effects of treatment, and what not to expect. Don't feel like you have to keep your house or garden tidy just because you always have in the past. Let others help you when you need it.

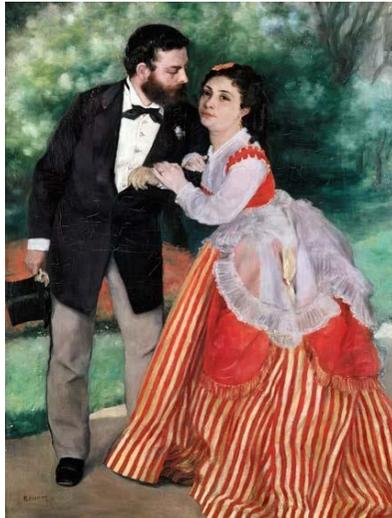
- take your time. You and your family are able to adapt to the changes that cancer brings with it over time. Being open to each other can help ensure that each person's needs are met.

- help your children (or grandchildren) understand that you have been treated for cancer. Children of patients interviewed said it was important:



- BE HONEST WITH THEM
- SPEAK DIRECTLY AND BE AS TRANSPARENT AS POSSIBLE
- ALLOW THEM TO BE INFORMED ABOUT CANCER AND TO BE INVOLVED IN CONVALESCENCE
- SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEM

With your permission, it would be good that communication about your situation between other family members and your children was as open as possible.



- ***HOW TO MANAGE PROBLEMS WITH THE PARTNER AND HOW TO MANAGE NEW RELATIONSHIPS***

"My boyfriend is gone. He is good for nothing. He didn't even want to touch me, and he never wanted to talk about my tumour. I wonder if I'll ever be able to trust anyone again".

Giovanna, patient with cervical cancer, 40 years old.

"Cancer has helped me find new ways to feel close to someone." Arturo, patient with bladder cancer, 52 years old

Your bodily changes and concerns about sex can affect how you relate to your partner or how you think about new relationships. As you try to accept the changes in your body, you may also worry about how someone else will react to scars, ostomies, sexual problems, and the loss of fertility. Sexual problems can make it even more difficult to feel close. Even for a couple who have been together for a long time, being together can be a major challenge at first. In reality, very few relationships end due to changes in the body. Divorce rates are about the same for people with and without a history of cancer. If you are single, you may be wondering how and when to tell your cancer story and your body changes to a new person in your life. Fear of rejection blocks some people from seeking the social life they would like to have. Others don't want a relationship life and prefer to be alone.

- **GET HELP WITH YOUR PARTNER**

If your concerns about your sexuality persist, try talking to a counsellor. An expert may be able to help you with your personal problems and prepare you to talk to your partner or a new person in your life. If you are single and you have difficulty restarting your romantic relationships you can always ask for help from an expert who can give you suggestions on how to deal with the delicate issue of sexuality.

 **TIP: TALK TO YOUR PARTNER**

It is very important to discuss and talk with your partner about your difficulties from the point of view of your sexuality after you have fallen ill with cancer. But how do you talk to your partner about sex after the treatment?

Here are some ideas that have helped other patients: Tell your partner how you feel about your sex life and what you would like to change. For example, you could tell him or her: • How do you feel your sexual attitude has changed. • Your thoughts and ideas about why your sex life has changed.

- How this situation makes you feel, for example, scared, lonely, sad, angry
- What would you like or what would make you feel better

This approach avoids blame and makes you feel better.

Here is an example of how you can talk to your partner:

- *We have made love a few times since I had the treatment* (clarify the problem)
- *I think the problem is my scars* (clarify what your belief is about the cause of the problem)
- *When we don't have sex, I feel very lonely, and I miss being close to you. I also sometimes feel angry that cancer affects our sex life* (express your feelings)
- *I would feel much better if we had sex more often and if it was more often your initiative* (express your needs) "

It may be important for you and your partner to listen to the other person's point of view to improve your communication:

- Repeat what he or she says in your own words to show that you understand.
- Ask questions to show interest and attention.
- Show support. Say things like, "You seem worried", or "I'm sure this is very difficult for you."
- Listen. Focus on your partner's comments, not on what you think you are saying in response.

- ***TIP: MEET A NEW PARTNER***

If you are single, it is possible that you still want to start new romantic relationships and that this is difficult for you due to what you have or are going through the disease. But how do you start having relationships again after you get cancer? Here are some ideas that have helped other patients:

- Start by working on other areas of your social life as well as finding a partner. Make an effort to increase your social life. Start a new business. Join an association. Take a course. These activities can increase your personal well-

being and also your chance to meet new people.

- Make a list of what you are looking for in a relationship.
- Try not to let cancer be an excuse not to go out with someone or not to meet people.
- Don't tell a new girl/boyfriend about cancer right away. Wait until you feel a sense of trust and friendship, but don't wait until the moment of intimacy to tell him/her.
- If you are worried about how to handle the situation, practice what you want to say with someone. Think about how he or she might react, and be ready to give an answer.
- Not every match has to be a "success." If someone refuses (which can happen with or without cancer), it's not a failure. Think rather that meeting new people can be interesting.
- Remember that not all dates "work", and this happens even before you have cancer.

PROBLEMS AT THE WORKPLACE

Find out as soon as possible what your rights are as a cancer patient.

It is possible that you will need documentation to apply for work permits or other. First you inform yourself first you will get the benefits you may be entitled to. Ask your doctor or team staff and know that you will find general information on the rights of cancer patients also at the AIMaC Information Point on the third floor of the Oncology Department in the Maggiore Hospital. They will be able to give you contacts of Associations that specifically will be able to give you a hand.

Unfortunately, it happens that discrimination is made towards patients once they return to the workplace. Employers and colleagues may have doubts about a patient with cancer's ability to work. Furthermore, staying at home due to illness could be a major problem for you if you are self-employed or if you are the only one to take care of your family financially.

- *TIP: MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS AT THE WORKPLACE*

Decide how to handle the problem

- What do you want to do?
- If necessary, ask your employer to adjust to your needs
- Find out about the rights of cancer patients by also contacting associations that deal with this issue. You can ask our (volunteer) staff to do research on associations that would know how to help you with your specific issues.
- Start talking informally to your manager, the personnel department, the union representative.
- Request a change that would make it easier for you to keep your job (for example, flexible hours, home work, special equipment at work).
- Keep all documentation.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to find hours for medical visits that don't conflict with your job responsibilities. Ask your doctor to write a letter to your employer or personnel manager explaining how, if at all, the disease can affect your work or your schedule.
- Contact the associations that deal with the rights of the sick.



PROBLEMS WITH FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

"When people tell you they see you great, don't you want to hit them?"
Alice, brain cancer patient, 50 years old.

The response from friends, colleagues and/or people after treatment can be a great source of anger, pain or dismay. Some people have good intentions, but they don't know what the right thing to say is. Maybe they just don't know how to offer support. Others don't want to hear about disease, even if cancer is still a daily challenge for you.

"When you say the word 'cancer', people turn around and walk away muttering something ..." said one patient. It is possible that friends and colleagues fail to support you sometimes they are really anxious about you or themselves. They feel your experience as a threat, because it reminds them that cancer can come to anyone. Try to understand their fears and be tolerant, try to maintain a good relationship with them. Many patients say strolling around happily to make others feel comfortable is a chore. *"I don't want to smile anymore"* said one melanoma patient. *"You don't have the energy to be like that"*. Another patient remarked that: "You know that if you complain sometimes you turn some people away. So I try not to do it. "

After going through what you've been through you try to figure out what are the things that matter most to you, so you can decide to give up some fragile friendships and give more time to the strong ones.

A brain cancer patient discovered that after cancer, *"You know how many true friends you have. And they don't stop calling you just because they know the tumour is in remission. They really love you and think of you."*

A kidney cancer patient found that *"Letting go of fragile friendships was tough, but I also had unexpected support from some colleagues and even some people at church"*. At work or where you volunteer, people may not understand that you can perform your duties normally, while recovering from treatment, or that you will need to resume your duties gradually. They may expect you to be unable to do your job or they may think that having cancer means you are dying. Sometimes, fears and a lack of knowledge can lead to unfair behaviour.

- ***HOW TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS YOU HAVE WITH FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES***

If you find out that a friend or colleague has feelings that bother you because you are or have been sick, try to solve the problem with this person face to face. If these efforts are not helpful in the workplace, try contacting your manager, the trade unions, or try to deal with the problem with a psychologist. When an abusive comment or action make you feel bad, talk about it with a friend, family member, or counsellor who can help you deal with it. But if the colleague's attitude puts you in trouble with the tasks you have to perform, it's a management problem that needs to be addressed.

- ***GENERAL TIPS ON HOW TO RELATE TO OTHERS***

How do you relate to other people after you get cancer? Here are some ideas that have helped other patients:

- Accept help

"When friends or family members offer to help you, say yes, and think of a few things that would make your life easier. This way, you will get the support you need, and your loved ones will feel useful. *"When I started treatment, I got a lot of help"* said one colon cancer patient. *"So I felt uncomfortable asking my friends for more help when I was at the end of the treatment. But I still really need it, so I let them know."*

- Address any problems that arise when back to work

Colleagues may be able to help those around you understand how you would like to be treated. In the event that your problems with others put you in difficulty with your job, you should speak to the boss, your union or the Human Resources department.

- Maintain contact during recovery

Friends and colleagues will care about you. If they learn about your treatment and your progress, they will be less anxious and scared. Talk to them on the phone or send emails. When you are able, go to lunch with friends or have an office party. Your return to work or other activities will be easier for you and others if you stay in touch..

- Decide what to say about your cancer

There is no one way to talk to others about your illness, but you need to think about what you will say when you get back to work. Some patients feel they don't want to talk about their illness or be labelled as sick. Others are very open about it, speaking frankly with the boss or other colleagues about the concerns they feel. The best approach is the one you feel is right.

IN CONCLUSION

Try to lead a life as normal as possible or perhaps more pleasant than the one you did before!

KEEP INFORMED AND INFORM US!

At any time there will always be a nurse, a doctor, a psychologist, or another member of our team who will be at your disposal to be able to listen to you and/or give you the most appropriate advice and prescriptions for you. Please remember that in addition to this booklet you will find at our facility (Information Point) volunteers and staff who will be able to indicate other specific readings that you may need in order to deepen all the issues concerning the ways of dealing with the disease.

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