From Patient to Advocate

People currently living with cancer, survivors and their loved ones can all be effective advocates.

March 18, 2019 By Liz Highleyman

One of our main goals at Cancer Health is to encourage people living with cancer to become advocates, both to improve their own care and quality of life and to push for better treatments and wider access for everyone who needs them.

Our sibling magazine, POZ, which turns 25 this year, has its roots in AIDS advocacy. During that time, HIV transformed from a fatal disease to a manageable chronic condition, thanks to the efforts of researchers, clinicians, pharmaceutical companies and the activists who demanded that they do more, faster. And they did. Once medications kept people alive, advocacy shifted to making treatment tolerable and easy to use; with that accomplished, the focus turned to a cure. Through it all, self-empowerment has been at the forefront.

Cancer is not there yet. New targeted therapies and immunotherapies hold promise, but they still don't work for most patients. Many people with cancer are happy if treatment can give them a few more months or years, even at the cost of diminished quality of life. But we need to do better—and advocates are stepping up to make that happen.

Florence Kurttila, on our cover, was successfully treated for colon cancer but later lost her husband to an aggressive form of the disease. She shares how she applied her insights to advocate for patient-centered care and research.

Patient-led research projects bring people with cancer and scientists together to address unanswered questions and unmet needs, from more effective drugs to more compassionate care.

For people who are successfully treated, the cancer journey doesn't end there. Ann Partridge explains how a survivorship counselor can help adjust to a new normal, and Jen Hodson tells it like it is about the lingering mental and physical challenges for survivors.

People currently living with cancer, survivors and their loved ones can all be effective advocates. Working together across cancer types—and with people with other diseases—provides the strength in numbers we need to demand better and more accessible health care.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.