

Hodgkin Lymphoma Patient Aims to Lessen Cancer Stigma

“Your diagnosis will eat you alive if you’re not positive; you’ll fall into a pit of feeling sorry for yourself. Change your ‘what if’ to ‘even if.’”

July 30, 2019 By Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Chloe Svolos is a social butterfly. When she isn’t working in the fundraising office for Dana-Farber’s Jimmy Fund, the 26-year-old is spending time with family, going out with friends, hanging out with her boyfriend, Luke, or traveling.

She also recently completed treatment for lymphoma — so she’s still adjusting to her “new normal.” But in the meantime, she’s focused on lessening the uncertainty that comes with a cancer diagnosis.

“There’s a horrible stigma about how to talk about cancer: people are afraid to have conversations, but I want to normalize it,” she says.

The diagnosis

In December of 2018, Svolos went on a trip to Scotland and returned with a sore throat. She thought it was just a swollen lymph node, but when she discovered a marble-sized lump in her neck, she decided she needed to go to a doctor. Then in the new year, after undergoing rounds of bloodwork, ultra sounds, CT scans, and a needle biopsy, she finally got answers.

On February 7, the same day she moved in with Luke, her doctor called and told her that she had stage II Hodgkin lymphoma.

Svolos was overwhelmed with a mix of emotions. “It felt like a bad dream,” she said — but she also recalls feeling a sense of relief.

“Working at Dana-Farber, I had a feeling it could be cancer — but when I was finally diagnosed, I felt like, ‘Okay, where should we go from here?’” she says.

Together, Svolos and her boyfriend called her family to tell them the news. Svolos decided she wanted to be treated at Dana-Farber. “My first option for care was the rest of the world’s first choice,” she says.

Soon after her diagnosis, Chloe started biweekly chemotherapy. She began making connections with patients around her, and soon, her chemo sessions became enjoyable. She loved her care team from day one, including her oncologist, Ann S. LaCasce, MD, and her nurse, Kristen Abdelmaseh, BSN, RN — and her friends, family, and co-workers came often to visit.

Svolos' "new normal" — and advice for others

Maintaining old routines and establishing new ones helped Svolos regain a sense of regularity during chemo. She stayed at her job and worked consistently. On treatment days, routines became crucial to establishing normalcy — and she advises other patients to also keep things consistent.

"Go to the same coffee place for breakfast, take the same route to the hospital, go to the same place for lunch afterwards," Chloe says. "Treatment can be intimidating when you don't know what chemotherapy and scans are like but knowing what to expect can really help."

After months of treatment, when her care team felt more like family and coming to the hospital had become part of her routine, Chloe's final day of treatment came in June 2019. Facing her last day of chemo came with its own bundle of emotions: Svolos says it didn't feel like her last treatment. Sadness overwhelmed her at the thought of not regularly seeing her care team, but her parents were happy and proud of her.

"It's tough — I'm so used to a routine that there's a lot of confusion and anxiety associated with being done," Svolos says. Although she's excited for some more free time, Chloe knows that "getting back to normal will never be the same normal."

To help her cope, she started a blog to share her story and start conversations about the ups and the downs of cancer, including what it's like to lose your hair and get a scan. She also writes about weekends with friends, her appreciation for her boyfriend, and the connections she made during cancer treatment.

What she learned

During treatment, Svolos experienced "imposter syndrome": she began to minimize her experience because she was young and considerably healthy. After talking to her support team, she learned to acknowledge her own journey, not compare it to others.

She also learned to be patient, and to respect herself. She came to understand her own emotions and recognize when she needed to talk or was tired. A self-proclaimed "people pleaser," Chloe had to teach herself how to say no to social engagements when she was feeling exhausted, and to not feel guilty when practicing self-care.

Not taking things for granted was also a major lesson. During her treatment, she and Luke began telling each other the highs and lows of their days. Doing this "helps put things in perspective — acknowledging what makes a day bad helps you deal with it," she says.

Svolos advises others with cancer, and other medical diagnoses, to "allow yourself to feel

whatever you're feeling. Know you're not alone. Try to keep a positive attitude as much as you can," she says. "Your diagnosis will eat you alive if you're not positive; you'll fall into a pit of feeling sorry for yourself. Change your 'what if' to 'even if.'"

[This article](#) was originally published on July 8, 2019, by Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/hodgkin-lymphoma-patient-aims-lessen-cancer-stigma>