

Meet a Legal Expert for People With Cancer

Joanna Fawzy Doran is a cancer rights attorney and the CEO of Triage Cancer, a national nonprofit providing free education on legal issues for people with cancer.

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What are some of the issues that you help patients navigate?

[Triage Cancer](#) is a national nonprofit organization that provides free education on all the legal and practical issues that may come up for patients and caregivers. Many of the challenges that people experience navigating the healthcare system and their medical condition are actually rooted in the law. For example, understanding your health insurance options and what you qualify for based on where you live and work, understanding what happens when insurance doesn't cover the care that your healthcare team is prescribing, understanding your options for working through treatment or taking time off or qualifying for disability benefits—those are the types of things that we help people understand.

What are other common topics your team encounters?

There are typically three questions that come up: Am I going to be able to work? Am I going to be able to get the care I need and have my insurance cover that care? And how am I going to be able to keep paying my bills? So employment, health insurance and finances are the top three issues that we get contacted about. The answers to those questions could be vastly different based on where somebody lives, where they work and what resources they have.

Tell us more about clients' concerns regarding the ability to work.

Based on their medical condition, are they able to keep working through treatment? If they need to take time off, can they do that and keep their job? And then, how do they maintain their income if they're not able to work or have to take time off?

How do you help in practical terms?

We explain to people what the law says and how it applies or maybe doesn't apply to their situation. We help them understand what their options are under the law and talk them through the practical aspects of getting access to what they need under the law. And we help them understand how to effectively navigate many of those systems so that they can weigh the pros and cons of each of their options and pick the one that is best for them.

What would you like patients and their loved ones to know about the legal issues around cancer?

The legal landscape is constantly changing—and that's true at the federal, state and even local level. Staying on top of those changes and understanding how they apply to people's daily lives is part of what we do at Triage. We pay attention to what's happening across the country and how those laws and proposed legislation can have an impact on the cancer community, and then, we translate that for people so that they understand and know what to do based on how those laws apply to them.

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