So, You're OK Now?

I don't really know if I'm OK. Sometimes I think I am, sometimes I think I'm falling into a pit of despair I can't get out of.

October 5, 2018 By Jen Hodson

I get the whole "So, you're OK now?" question a lot. A LOT. And I don't blame people for asking it, we're a big picture society, we want the abridged version, the snapshot, the 60 second update and then we want to move on. "How's the cancer?" "Well, I'm in remission but…" "Fantastic, that's great news, so glad to hear" and so on and so forth until we land in a much more pleasant conversational setting.

I'm about a year and a half out from treatment, and I'm coming up on my two year diagnosi-versary. My hair has grown back to a socially acceptable length, and my surgeries are (for the most part) over with. There's no real physical remnants of treatment land that can be seen, not unless you're looking for them, and then you might spot some peculiar scars around.

But, I don't really know if I'm OK. Sometimes I think I am, sometimes I think I'm falling into a pit of despair I can't get out of. There is a lot that goes into an early stage cancer diagnosis and I'm not sure the world recognizes the amount of recovery needed. I think it might be similar for other illnesses/disorders, but I'm going to stick to what I know in this post.

And so, for the masses, I'd like to outline some of the difficulties I face while I'm in recovery. In bullet point version, for the millennial reader. To do so, I'm going to break it down to the three categories I have symbolized on my arm: Mind, body, soul.

Mind:

- PTSD
- panic and anxiety attacks
- inability to sleep
- constant fear
- memory loss
- reduction in sharpness (chemo brain)
- Inability to concentrate or multi-task

Body:

- reactions to medications (weight gain, bloating, mood changes)
- various scars
- phantom itching
- nerve pain
- reduced flexibility
- achy joints
- severe lethargy
- complete overhaul of sexual function
- chronic fatigue, inability to emote
- loss of self confidence

Soul:

- isolation
- fear of connecting, how do I explain this to a partner?
- loss of identity, who am I now?
- loneliness, who can understand me?
- fear
- compassion fatigue from friends and family
- detachment

This list is depressing. But it is what it is. Every day I strive to work through solutions, possibilities, motivating chats with myself, to get through these difficulties and try to feel “OK” again. And there is so much promise that I am healing more and more everyday. But just because I’m in remission, and I look more like I used to, I don’t necessarily know if I’m actually doing all right.

So, my advice to anyone would be: Don’t ask me if I’m OK now, just ask me how I’m doing, ask me how I’m feeling. I promise to keep it short and sweet. And I promise to be honest. Because if you don’t want to hear it, you shouldn’t have asked.

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