An Open Letter to the Person Just Diagnosed With Cancer

Know that you are not alone — we are your brothers and sisters in arms against this mighty beast called cancer.

November 15, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

I wish it wasn't true — I wish it didn't happen anymore to anyone but I know that it will…

Just breast cancer alone has a diagnosis rate of every 2 minutes — and that's not counting all of the kinds of cancer that exist in this world.

Unfortunately I keep hearing of more and more people diagnosed and they are getting closer and closer to my circle and it seems I am the person everyone thinks of — as I am the cancer mom; the woman diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer with no lump and with amazing speed from clogged milk duct (microscopic at that) to a 5.6cm tumor with lymph node involvement and an 8+ month process of treatment and then a further 24 months of clinical trial drugs and the big unknown of cancer always in my sights though trying like mad to forget it.

What I want you to know, dear unlucky friend, is that you are one of millions diagnosed probably today — but it does not bring you peace. Instead think of this —

1. Know that you are not alone — though you don't know us yet, you will soon — we are your brothers and sisters in arms against this mighty beast called cancer and we know all too well how sneaky it is and how much we are always in the gray area — until we aren't again and then we wish for the gray. It can always be worse — until sometimes for some of us, it is. We can do nothing between now and then except wait and give it our all; let us help you do that.

2. Grieve your before — mourn as much as you need to the life that seemed so hard even though you were "healthy," but don't get bogged down too much in the mire — try not to spiral too much — your life, your well-being depends on you being able to get through it — and it's not easy but it will prove to you how much you can do and how much people can love you, and also the opposite, the bad stuff — but you will be surprised how much you can handle when you have "no choice."

3. Know you always have choices — most important is your medical team and how you want to proceed — know that you still do have some control but also that most of the control is now in the hands of your medical team, your surgical response, your pathology, your options —

4. Be prepared to learn a vocabulary — no one wants to learn about meds, medical jargon, and more — always have a notebook and pen to write questions to record the answers and to hopefully have someone with you to do both for you.

5. Be how you have to be — whether it’s strong and warrior-like or crying and scared — your reaction to a very bad situation is your own — you are still you. Find what brings you peace and do that — and if you can’t find it, ask me and I will help you try.

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