Lessons Learned from Cancer Part II

May 24, 2017 By Justin Birckbichler

To say cancer changes your perspective on life would be an understatement. There are physical changes, financial costs, and numerous emotional tolls that you'll encounter along the way. For me, cancer forced me to take a good, hard look at my life. Just as I teach my students, cancer taught me many lessons.

Everyone Has a Cancer Story

Cancer affects nearly one quarter of the population, whether that is from directly having it or an indirect experience from a friend or family member having it. When you're diagnosed with cancer, you will find that everyone has a story to share.

On one hand, this can be comforting. You're not alone in this battle and you know who you can turn to. On the other, it can get overwhelming. I would get advice, sometimes unsolicited from complete strangers, that would contradict others' advice or what my oncologist had told me. I was often confused by what would be "best" for me to do.

If I am asked now about what to expect with cancer, I always preface it by saying it's my take on it. I'm hesitant to offer advice without being asked because I know it wasn't something I always appreciated. Be cognizant of that - your best intentions can be somewhat damaging to a cancer patient who is just trying to survive from day to day.

Cancer Can Consume You

As I shared in my Spring Break Paranoia post, I still have a real fear of recurrence. I just scheduled my second post-chemo CT scan, and I could feel those fears pushing through again. I'm sure that everything will be fine (and that I can finally get this itchy port removed), but it's always on the back of my mind.

Some evenings, I'll find myself browsing the Internet and ending up on the oncologist's website or scrolling through cancer patient forums, reading stories of people who had their cancer come back after remission. I don't know why this is, but I normally realize that it is not helping quell my recurrence fears and put an end to it sooner rather than later.

Running a cancer blog and Instagram might seem counterproductive to not allowing cancer to consume me, but just like it's important for me to let my emotions out, it's important to get my feelings about cancer out on my terms and in a way that is helpful for others. Additionally, I think

it’s important to have a real perspective for other potential cancer patients, since it was something I had a hard time finding.

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