Why You Should Share Your Cancer Story

Sharing your story of cancer's impact is critical to you and to others.

July 3, 2019 By Justin Birckbichler

Sharing my story has been a crucial part of why I began ABSOT. It's what has kept me going day in and day out for over two years. Recently, I collaborated with with New Life Outlook on writing posts for our respective websites. They wrote the following piece on the importance of sharing one's cancer story. After finishing this post, be sure to check out the piece I wrote on their site, titled "Getting Back On Track After Testicular Cancer."

Every day, you come face-to-face with countless questions and decisions to make. Many of them involve some level of pain, sacrifice, and cost, which adds tremendous uncertainty and confusion to the choice. When you're dealing with a cancer diagnosis, or are undergoing treatment, these decisions become even more difficult.

Though it may be impossible to get any clarity in life, there is one decision that always makes sense. For you or anyone in your situation, sharing the story of cancer's impact is always the right decision. Letting others know about your first-hand experiences—both positive and negative—will help them in many ways.

Your Cancer Story

To begin, your cancer story is simply your experience with cancer. It is a way for you to describe the trials and tribulations, the terrors and triumphs, and the pains and promise of your condition.

The most crucial aspect of your cancer story is that it does not have to be a certain way: no two stories will look or sound the same, because each experience is different. Your story of cancer's effect on your life is a wholly unique narrative from your own perspective.

Your story could be a detailed, chronological journey through every step of the process from the first warning sign to your most recent follow-up scan. Or, it could be an expression of your feelings in poem, painting, or video form. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story.

Your cancer story could involve your direct, personal experiences with the diagnosis, your time watching a loved one with the condition, or your professional work caring for people with the disease. Just because you have not had cancer does not mean you don't have a cancer story worth

sharing.

Storytelling Risks

By now, you're probably wondering why anybody would be interested in sharing their cancer stories, and why another person would be interested in hearing it. You may think there is too much risk associated with telling these experiences.

The biggest risks of telling your story are:

- You will bring up all of the unwanted thoughts and feelings about your cancer, and you will be left to relive the experiences.
- You will trigger unpleasant memories of others who have been deeply affected by the disease.

Undoubtedly, sharing any story of personal pain is sure to stir up some issues, but this is not a problem. It is a positive facet of the experience.

Storytelling Benefits

Of course, the risks are present, but with no risks, there are no rewards. The rewards of sharing your story far outweigh the potential harms.

For you, cancer is all about loss. Even if you triumph over your diagnosis, you experienced a life-altering loss. You lost your sense of health, independence, power, and control.

Losses do not only get better by being ignored. Instead, when swept under the rug, they are left to grow, fester, and seep into other areas of your life.

Only by bringing losses into the light can you appropriately grieve and mourn the stress of the experience. Telling and retelling the story is one of the key elements to any healthy grieving process.

For others, cancer is all about the unknown. If they are beginning their journey with cancer, they have no idea what is around the corner or what the next appointment holds.

Hearing, reading, or seeing your cancer story can provide much-needed insight into what lies ahead, which reduces anxieties. With lower stress, others can begin to build hope and trust in the treatment process while building realistic expectations of what's to come.

Cancer's Power to Isolate

Cancer is an isolating disease. Even though people may be surrounding you and giving their love and support, it can make you feel awfully alone.

Perhaps the most significant impact of sharing your story about cancer is the connection it forms. With connections in place, you feel less isolated, and experience a heightened sense of belonging.

At first, sharing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to cancer will help you feel connected to yourself. Too often, people avoid and dismiss their experience, which results in painful moments later.

Second, sharing your thoughts will connect you to other people at various stages and levels of cancer involvement. Despite cancer's power to isolate, cancer can actually bring people together because the condition touches so many.

Third, sharing your story helps others connect to themselves and their loved ones. Your one story can create change in the lives of so many.

Methods of Story Sharing

Sharing your story does not need to occur on a grand stage. An audience of just one is enough to make your story sharing worthwhile.

If you're ready to share, consider:

- Talking to friends and family
- Making a thoughtful social media post
- Attending support groups for people with cancer
- Contacting cancer associations in your area

Just as there is no wrong way to create your story, there is no wrong way to share it.

The Win-Win of Honesty

Some choices are selfish with outcomes that only seem to benefit you and your best interests, while other choices seem selfless as they only result in results that help everyone else. Sharing your cancer story is the perfect balance of selfish and selfless because it benefits everyone equally.

Honesty is often a difficult proposition, but it doesn't need to be. Being truthful with yourself and others is the path to acceptance, patience, and understanding.

About NewLifeOutlook:

NewLifeOutlook aims to empower people living with chronic mental and physical health conditions, encouraging them to embrace a positive outlook despite unfortunate circumstances. Their articles are full of practical advice from people who have firsthand experience of living with a chronic condition.

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