

Tending the spirit

By Rev. Ken Morse, Salem Health chaplain

The events of the past year have presented us with many lessons to consider. A few of them are that life is worthy of celebration, that life is best lived in community, that our approach to a situation oftentimes effects the outcome, and that life is too short to postpone joy.

In marking National Cancer Survivors Month, we can make use of the same postures which have helped us navigate the immediate past. Here is a short list of those postures or approaches toward life.

Resiliency

This word is much used these days. It is used here to mean the ability to come back from adversity and come back stronger. To bounce back and bounce higher. The National Cancer Survivors Day website (ncsd.org) describes this event as a celebration of life. It can be comforting to know that a diagnosis of cancer often ends with successful treatment. In America alone, nearly 17 million people are alive today after a cancer diagnosis.

Our spirituality is a part of our journey with cancer as whole persons. For you that might mean regular times of mindfulness or meditation, prayer, journaling or reflection. This is where we recall other difficult life experiences we have faced and remember what got us through those times. Some people embrace music and other art expressions as a way to nurture the spirit through a time of challenge.

Positivity

Hearing the words “you have cancer” means starting a new chapter of life. Starting this new chapter may mean not having a script for what is to come. Hearing a diagnosis and treatment plan from a trusted cancer professional can mean the difference between moving forward with confidence or fear.

Your treatment team is prepared to answer questions like those on the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship website (canceradvocacy.org):

- What information do I need to help me make a decision about treatment?
- What are the chances I can be cured?
- Will I be able to work during treatment?
- Are there clinical trials available to me?

It is important to remain kind and gentle with ourselves before treatment, during and after treatment. As a cancer survivor from her own experience says, “the end of treatment means a new normal.” Regular spiritual exercises like lovingkindness prayer can keep our hearts open to the many good things in our lives every day.

Resourcefulness

Perhaps the greatest relief of living with cancer comes in realizing we don't have to manage every aspect of this experience alone. Commemorating this day means doing so with countless others around the United States and around the world. The site on which you are reading this

page is full of helpful information about what to expect, who to contact, where to go for more information and how you can get involved in the ongoing work of advocating for those surviving cancer. This includes, but is not limited to, web-based resources hosted by hospitals, hospice agencies, cancer doctors and other reputable sources.

Houses of worship can be great places to meet others with a cancer story of their own. Many faith communities sponsor support groups for those learning to live with cancer. It might just be that what you need is a kindred spirit with whom to travel.

May you embrace the goodness of this life and the good things that lie before you with grace. May your journey be in the company of supportive others. May you find hidden strength you never knew you possessed.