

Coping with Cancer

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Doc, I have Cancer...what should I do next?

It is not uncommon for people to shut down mentally once they hear the word "cancer." There is nothing good to hear about cancer and no one "deserves" to have it or expecting to have it. A cancer diagnosis is hard to swallow and having cancer is not easy. Accepting the diagnosis and figuring out how cancer fits into your life can be very challenging. I hope when you read this article it will benefit you as I have patients who cannot accept the truth when I read the "verdict" to them upon reviewing their pathology reports. Some of them have also told me, they had led a healthy lifestyle of eating and exercising regularly, do not smoke either and it is impossible for them to have cancer.



After my patients are diagnosed with cancer, very often they will feel shock, disbelief, fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness, grief, depression, and anger. Each person may have some or all of these feelings, and each will handle and respond in a different way. Sometimes, the news is too much for them and their spouse to accept, I can see sorrow from their expression. Often, I will give them a short break to let their emotions settle down before they come and see me again for their next appointment.

Meanwhile, what I will usually advise patients to do is to confide their grief with someone close to them, for instance, their spouse, their children or someone whom they can trust and is a good listener.

In addition to that, it is easier to face the reality of a new or scary situation if they learn as much as they can about it. This is especially true when you are dealing with a complex group of diseases like cancer. There is often a great fear of the unknown and uncertainty about what is going to happen and as a result, this fear will eventually start to build up in their mind and they will start to become pessimistic and even have thoughts of suicide. ***Knowledge can help lessen the fear of the unknown.***

You can learn a lot about the type of cancer you have, its treatment, and your chances for recovery. A lot of information can be obtained from the internet from reliable sources or a trip to the library.

However, I would discourage my patients from getting information through their friends or relatives as they may give them incorrect information or even end up discouraging them rather than helping them.

As a doctor, I will disclose as much information as possible to my patients and I have no problem with patients taking an hour or two of my consultation to address their concerns because ***the more they know, the less fear they have***. And they can make better decisions and support the treatment options I would recommend to them.

“Seeking treatments has enlightened me and my wife a lot and now we can see some smiles on our face. We have confidence that their team of doctors are doing as much to help us as they could. Dr Chopra is very detailed and explained to us everything we need to know” ...Mr Roby Budiono, an Indonesian patient diagnosed with lymphoma cancer 4 months ago.

When looking for information about any type of cancer, first know what type of cancer you have. Ask the doctor for information about your specific type of cancer, including the cell type and the stage (extent) of your cancer. This is helpful because your cancer treatment will be customized just for you.

Lastly, before appointments, write down any questions you may have about your type of cancer, treatment, side effects, and any limits on activity you might have during treatment. Other members of the health care team, such as pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, physical therapists, and radiation therapists are experts in different areas. Don't be afraid to ask them questions, too.

Last but not least...pay attention to your physical needs for rest and I need to emphasize this, ***please rest well***...nutrition, and other self-care measures. Find ways to express your feelings, such as talking or writing in a journal. Allow yourself private time and space. Walk or exercise. You will be amazed by the positive benefits of just taking a walk at the park say, the botanical gardens.

**So, do not give up the fight!
Be your own advocate.**

Dr Akhil Chopra

