

GIVING BACK: WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CANCER

Many people may want to make a difference in cancer. They may want to learn how to help their neighbors, join an educational group, run in a race, influence legislation, or be part of a group that makes decisions about cancer research or programs.

Cancer survivors and those who are close to them know what it is like to live with cancer. Getting involved in cancer-related activities is like a two-way street: when you help others, you also help yourself. Some of the benefits include accepting cancer as part of your life, being less afraid of cancer, feeling more spiritual and fulfilling a promise to God or a higher power, or feeling you are doing something useful with your cancer experience.

THINK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

People often think about their own experience when they get involved in a cancer-related activity. This is good for some people, as it can help them deal with their own feelings. This can also be hard; sometimes people become upset when they get involved. Take some time to think about your feelings. If you are very worried, angry, or depressed right now, you might want to talk with a counselor about your feelings and later, when you feel more positive, you can begin to think about ways to help others.

Think about your comfort in talking about cancer. You can still get involved in cancer-related activities even if you do not want to talk about your own experience. If this is how you feel, find activities in which you do not have to share your personal feelings or thoughts.

CONSIDER YOUR SKILLS AND TALENTS

Here are some examples of ways people have put their talents and interests to work to make a difference in cancer:

<i>Skill or Talent</i>	<i>What you like to do</i>
Listening	Help people tell their stories and express their concerns. You also answer questions without giving your opinion or passing judgment
Support	Help others by offering to do errands, baby-sit, or drive them to appointments

Enthusiasm	Motivate others and give them ideas about how to get things done.
Creativity	Come up with new ideas or use your talents, such as quilting, selling homemade desserts, or developing a public relations campaign
Learning & teaching	Learn new information and teach others what you know.
Communication	Write. You can get your ideas across by writing articles or speaking in public.
Group work	Work with others and be part of a team that gets things done.
Office skills	Use the computer, talk on the phone, and organize records and files.
Organizational skills	Plan meetings, events, or group activities, (like organizing a phone call alert list or “tree,” planning a fundraiser, or starting a local support group).
Leadership skills	Take charge and get things done. Get people to work together on an activity.

LEARNING ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

At Vanderbilt

Volunteers are the backbone of the Patient and Family Support Services program. Opportunities exist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and at the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center (VICC). For information on volunteering with patients undergoing treatment contact Andy Peterson at 615-936-8871 or email andrew.r.peterson@vanderbilt.edu. Volunteer duties include providing information, serving patients refreshments, listening to and escorting clinic patients or visiting with hospitalized patients.

With VICC’s Hope Connection, volunteers provide one-to-one telephone support to adult cancer patients and their families. By providing

encouragement, guidance, coping strategies, and resources, volunteers help individuals reduce their fear and uncertainty, strengthen their ability to cope, feel more prepared for treatment and decision making, and give them hope. Requirements include being a cancer survivor or caregiver at least one year past treatment, completing the application process including interview and background check, and attending 8 hours of training. For more information call 615-936-8501 or email canceradvocacy@vanderbilt.edu.

Cancer survivors have a unique and important contribution to make to cancer research and are increasingly playing an important role in the cancer care setting. By participating in the development and oversight of research, survivors as advocates can truly influence the nature of cancer research and the future of patient care. At VICC, the Research Advocacy Program is made up of committed cancer survivors and caregivers actively involved in helping researchers and their teams make the translation of cancer research to cancer patients efficient and effective. Survivors must be one year past treatment and have an interest in learning and participating in cancer research advocacy. For more information call 615-936-1072.

Other avenues for serving patients are Music in the Clinic (615-343-7776) and Pet Visitation Therapy (615-343-7776).

Many people want to be involved at VICC but are not able to volunteer in a traditional weekly or bi-weekly commitment. They can be involved by making hats, turbans, or scarves for patients undergoing treatment or by providing items such as snacks, games, puzzles, etc. Call Patient and Family Support Services at 615-343-7776 for more information.

For more information on these opportunities visit www.vicc.org/cancercare/support/volunteer.php

In Middle Tennessee and Beyond

Each state has a Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition which welcomes volunteer survivors, family members as well as medical and public health professionals to work to reduce the burden of cancer on its citizens. Each coalition has produced a Cancer Control Plan addressing the most important cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship issues. For information on the Tennessee coalition, call 615-741-1638 or 800-547-3558 or visit <http://health.state.tn.us/cccp/index.htm> For information on other states' plans visit www.cancerplan.org

The Witness Project in Nashville is a grass roots community-based breast and cervical cancer education program in which volunteer survivors and lay health advisors educate African American women about how to best protect themselves from these two cancers. For more information contact the Witness Project coordinator at 615-340-5680.

National Cancer Organization with Volunteer Opportunities in the Mid-South

American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org, 800-ACS-2345

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, www.lls.org, 800-955-4572

Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation, www.komen.org

Tennessee Breast Cancer Coalition, www.tbcc.org, 615-377-8777

<http://canconnect.org/CanConnect>, Middle Tennessee's online community for cancer survivorship
<http://canconnect.org>

For a more detailed directory of resources, please visit www.vicc.org/cancersurvivor or call the VICC Patient Resource Center at 615-322-9799

To order the book Facing Forward Ways You Can Make a Difference in Cancer, call 1-800-4-CANCER or visit www.cancer.gov/publications

Works cited:

National Cancer Institute: Facing Forward: Ways You Can Make a Difference in Cancer