Coping with Cancer and Chronic Illness: A Roller Coaster of Emotions

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Feeling Isolated
Coping Strategy

- Seek support either individually or in a group setting
Anxiety

Coping strategies

- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Exercise
- Journaling
- Regaining a sense of control
- Education
- Spirituality

Fear

Coping Strategies

- Identify the fear
- Face the fear
- Talk with your supports and medical providers about your fears
Anger

Coping Strategies

• Accept your anger
• Explore your anger
• Find a supportive listener

Stages of Grief

• Denial
• Anger
• Bargaining
• Depression
• Acceptance
Managing long term relationships

Coping Strategies
• Keep open communication
• Seek support
• Try to understand what it’s like for the other person
• Creative intimacy

Appearance

Coping Strategies
• Take time for yourself
• Find ways to make yourself feel more comfortable with the changes in your appearance
• Reframing meaning of body image changes
Finding purpose and building structure

Coping Strategies

• Create a structure for your day even if you’re no longer working
• Find something creative to do
• Set short and long term goals
• Try something new

Managing information with children

Coping Strategies

• Open communication
• Regular check-ins
• Sharing information with teachers, counselors, coaches
Feeling Invisible

Coping Strategies

• Join a group
• Join an on-line forum
• Establish an informal support group in your community or church
• Educate people about your illness

Caregiver concerns

Coping Strategies

• Encourage good self-care
  • Time for yourself
• Find your own supports
• Consider sharing some of your emotions with your loved one
“It is not hard to live through a day if you can live through a moment. What creates despair is the imagination, which pretends there is a future and insists on predicting millions of moments, thousands of days, and so drains you that you cannot live the moment at hand.”

--André Dubus

Logistics

- Monthly group (1.5 hrs)
- Ask for regular attendance after 1st session
- Welcome e-mail with group guidelines
- Biographies of members, contact lists after consent
- Name tags
- Bottled water, food (±)
Sample biography

- K - lives in xx with her 17 month old super son, L and 8 year old sweet mutt. In 2014, she was diagnosed with DCIS during her first mammogram. (She needed to get a mammogram to start IVF after the age of 40. Otherwise she wasn’t planning on getting one until she was 45 or 50). Surprise! Against doctor and family wishes, she chose to do "watchful waiting" and continue her pursuit to build a family. DCIS had been getting a lot of press as being over treated so she decided to "gamble". K chose to pursue natural remedies and consulted online with "the voice of alternative medicine" (He himself has since died.). In 2016, she gave birth to L and breast fed him for 8 months before noticing changes in her DCIS breast (swelling and hardness). At her next mammogram in 2017, she expected bad news and prepared herself mentally for a mastectomy. The mammogram and ultra sound showed progression. Her oncologist had her go for a bone and CT scan before deciding their next move. Surprise again. The cancer had spread extensively throughout her spine and a bit to her liver. Her cancer is ER+ HER2-. She started Ibrance with Tamoxifen in May and will be getting a Lupron shot and Zometa every 3 months.

Content

- Open-ended
- Inquiries about medical and emotional issues
- Concerns about spouses/partners
- Concerns about children
- Concerns about caregiving
- Role transitions – decisions to retire/take disability
- Stress of ED visits, hospitalizations
- Processing departures and deaths of members
Building group cohesion

- Inquire and inform group of reasons for absences/missed sessions
- Occasional e-mail contact between groups
- Permit contact outside group
  - Lunches, visits, memorials
  - Monitor effects on group dynamics

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