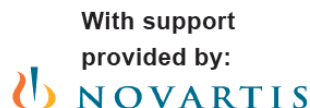


To Stay in the Game, Maintain Your Frame



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When Your Loved One Has Cancer

Taking care of a loved one recently diagnosed with a cancer such as multiple myeloma can be both physically and emotionally challenging. Karen Miller, LSW, MSW, M.Ed, PhD Candidate at Howard University, Washington D.C., has provided counsel and support to various cancer patients and their families as they deal with a cancer diagnosis. Below, she provides answers to some common questions caregivers may have as they navigate managing to take care of a loved one while still taking care of themselves.

Please visit www.MaintainYourFrame.com or www.naltblackchurch.com for additional information on multiple myeloma. This content is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Q: I feel stressed and overwhelmed. Even if I feel this way, I don't want to burden my loved one with my emotions as he/she has been diagnosed with cancer. Where can I turn to for support?

A: It is normal to feel multiple types of emotions when you have just learned that your loved one has been diagnosed with cancer. You may feel anger, sadness, guilt, grief or even loneliness because you feel caregiving is solely your responsibility. Having your loved one diagnosed with cancer may be difficult to deal with alone.

It is important to understand that your emotions are normal and that you need time to process them. Often caregivers find it helpful to speak with someone regarding their emotions, whether it is a family member, close friend, priest, spiritual leader, counselor, or a physician. You may also want to consider joining a cancer support group where you can feel safe to discuss and share your feelings among those who share similar experiences associated with providing caregiving. Support groups are safe havens where you can express yourself without feeling judged or alone, and you can give and receive suggestions from other group members on various issues. It is healthy to express, and not suppress your feelings and emotions. Friendships made in the support groups can be meaningful and strong. Requesting help from others may help you to feel better, increase your energy level, which in turn can help you take better care of your loved one.

The following are a few examples of organizations you can reach out to for details on cancer support groups and multiple myeloma groups specifically: American Cancer Society; CancerCare; Cancer Survivors Network; Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; and the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation.

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Q: How do I make time for myself when I have to make sure my loved one is cared for?

A: Taking time for yourself can be difficult, given that you need to take care of your loved one, and possibly others, such as your family. However, taking time, short or long, each day, can assist in relieving some of the stresses associated with caregiving. It is appropriate and practical to ask a close friend, family member, community service agency (respite care) or someone from your church community to assist you in the support of your loved one; this would enable you to receive some rest and time for yourself. Try to do something nice for yourself daily such as a hobby, stay active by stretching, walking, resting or communicating with a close friend.

Q: Is there anything I should know or bring with me when I take my loved one to his/her doctor?

A: Allow sufficient time to get to the doctor's appointment; this will decrease your chance of staying in the doctor's office longer than needed. Prior to the appointment, write down any questions or concerns you may have regarding your loved one's health on paper. Take a folder with you that contains your loved one's health information and a list of current medications that he/she is taking. Do not feel that any question is too small to ask the doctor. If you do not understand what the doctor is communicating to you, ask him/her to explain the answer in terms that you understand or ask the question in a different way. Additionally, most physicians can determine whether your loved one qualifies for home health services (such as nurse care) and can refer you to a home health agency. If you are in a hospital, you can speak with a social worker, who can provide information regarding services that may be available to you in your community.

Q: There are many tasks involved as a caretaker such as making sure your loved one takes his/her daily medication, making his/her doctor's appointments, etc. How do I stay organized with the many tasks associated with caregiving?

A: As a caregiver, you have several responsibilities and it may be helpful to keep a daily "to do list" and prioritize your caregiving tasks by importance. Do not be afraid to ask for help, and try to divide daily tasks with your family, friends, or hired help. Keep a list of those persons who are available to assist you, including names and phone numbers. Planning ahead may also make you feel more in control. Develop schedules outlining when tasks need to be completed so you can determine who is available to assist you at a specific time.

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Q: My doctor told me if you have multiple myeloma, the disease can lead to bone complications such as weakened bones and fractures. Are there any particular nutritional needs of my loved one living with multiple myeloma, which may protect bone health?

A: Consider buying or cooking foods that are enriched with calcium and vitamin D for your loved one with multiple myeloma. In addition, you can ask your loved one's physician what foods are best.

References

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