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SURVIVORSHIP

Rockwood Clinic showcases a new initiative for patients

by Blythe Thimsen

Imagine you have been eagerly waiting for your retirement, and it finally arrives. You've been looking forward to not having to get up early every morning, commute to the office, handle frustrated clients, attend meetings or rush to meet deadlines or quotas. Retirement is the carrot that you have been chasing. You've achieved your goal! The next morning you wake up, walk leisurely to the mirror and suddenly it hits you, "What now? I have no idea what to do."

In some ways that feeling of freedom is



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invigorating and welcomed; in other ways it is downright terrifying. A very similar feeling can follow some cancer survivors as they reach the completion of their treatment. The hard work of treatment is completed, but what now? What does the road going forward look like?

For many cancer survivors, the recent months, if not years, have been spent with one goal in mind: completing treatment and returning to normal life. Once they are finally free to move on from treatment, it can be scary. The team of doctors and

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nurses, many of whom they saw on a regular basis, are no longer by their side. The world they temporarily built around them, which may have served as a source of security, has crumbled away. The training wheels are off, and they are on their own. It is a rough transition.

One local health care system, Rockwood Clinic, has piloted a new program, which is making that transition less frightening for cancer survivors, and is helping to make their healthcare more thorough. This is accomplished through a program known as The Rockwood Health System Cancer Survivorship Initiative.

According to the National Cancer Institute and the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, "An individual is considered a cancer survivor from the time of diagnosis, through the balance of his or her life. Family members, friends and caregivers are also impacted by the survivorship experience and are therefore included in this definition."

"Cancer survivorship is people living with cancer, too," for whom treatment may be no longer effective or desirable, says Jeanne Robison, ARNP, M.N., an oncology nurse practitioner for Rockwood Clinic who is helping to bring the survivorship care plan program to Rockwood patients.

For survivors, whether they are cancer free, or living with cancer, having a plan for their continued health care is essential. Enter a survivorship care plan. It is a document, given to a cancer survivor, and available for review in a medical record, summarizing the diagnostic and treatment journey of an individual. The plan also includes recommendations for follow-up, future cancer screenings and care. The plan is individualized and created by the cancer team when treatment has completed, or when the plan of care has transitioned into a period of surveillance.

A survivorship care plan helps a patient, and his or her entire medical team, know what the plan is for after he or she completes cancer treatment. It is a map for



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the uncharted territory of survivorship. One key element is that the plan doesn't just stay in the medical file; a copy is provided to the patient, empowering them to be part of the process and they move forward as a survivor.

The program was piloted with a group of cancer survivors in 2012. Rockwood's goal is that by 2013, all cancer patients will be a part of the program. There certainly isn't a shortage of patients who could benefit from a similar program. There are 12 million U.S. cancer survivors, and one out of six people over age 65 is a cancer survivor.

"The Institute of Medicine has put survivorship on the front burner," says Robison, of part of the reason the program is such a high priority. "This is a wave—survivorship—is picking up speed."

The Rockwood Health System Cancer Survivorship Initiative keys into the fact that Rockwood, "as an integrated health system, providing cancer care, has the unique opportunity to impact the quality of life, care and support of cancer survivors and their families, both before, during and following a cancer diagnosis."

"We have an opportunity to make use of this because we're not just a stand alone cancer center, we're a health care organization," says Robison. The other two cancer clinics in town are not part of a health system, so they are not able to offer a similar program at this time. "We're taking advantage of something we are really lucky to have in town (shared medical files)."

A survivorship care plan is important for the survivor because it allows their primary care doctor to know the plan for their health care, and to be an active part of providing that care. "There needs to be communication," says Robison. "Because we are giving them [survivors] a cancer care plan, they are then a partner in their health. We take time to treat the overall health, and people feel safe with this. They feel like there is a plan and there is cohesiveness."

Where there's a plan, there's a way. **S**



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