



Charting Your Journey

What You Need to Know as You Navigate Cancer Treatment

by Carole O'Toole

While everyone who faces cancer travels his or her own unique journey, this singular experience connects us all. As a cancer coach, I have listened to hundreds of survivors share their hard-earned wisdom in finding their way through cancer. In doing so, I have found these five universal truths from cancer survivors.

1 Define your priorities. Cancer is a whole-person illness; it challenges you emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually.

seek help from a patient navigator or advocate at a cancer treatment center.

3 Be selective with your care. While insurance coverage may limit your provider choices, it is still worthwhile to put some effort into assembling the best possible cancer care team for you. This includes researching and selecting your medical team, as well as considering the use of complementary therapies. There is a world of appropriate evidence-based complementary treatments that can be used alongside your medical care and that can assist in your recovery. Take

return themselves to wholeness. While opportunities for healing present themselves differently for each person, feeding your spirit is essential for everyone when it comes to living well with cancer. These opportunities can be enhanced through journaling, seeking moments of solitude, and finding joy even in the face of your illness.

5 Know that infinite patience is required. While we all hope for a good outcome and an end to dealing with this illness, there are millions of us who continue

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Your entire world is affected – work, relationships, core beliefs, self-image, and day-to-day experiences. However, even though you cannot change your cancer diagnosis, you do have some control over how you live your life after you are diagnosed. Take the time to examine and define what matters to you most and how you want to live with your illness.

2 Advocate for yourself. Support is available for those living with cancer, but you must ask for it and be clear about what you need. You have the right to determine how your medical team interacts with you and how your family and friends support you. Many of us are uncomfortable with speaking up for ourselves; we value our independence or are so used to putting others' needs before our own that we dismiss the possibility of asking for help or clarifying our needs. If this is true for you, select an advocate from your immediate community of family or friends, or

some time to research your options for integrative oncology care.

4 Actively seek opportunities for healing. Every cancer survivor I have ever worked with has expressed the same goal: to

live with cancer. Like with any journey, storms come up, detours are taken, and you may feel lost for a while. Patience and flexibility are almost mandatory. Look for opportunities to rest and restore your spirit. Know that your experience with cancer can indeed be a journey of healing.



Carole O'Toole

Carole O'Toole is a 19-year advanced cancer survivor and the director of Integrative Navigation at Smith Center for Healing and the Arts in Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization offering supportive resources for people affected by cancer nationwide. She has written two books on integrative cancer care, Cancer Community Healing Network and Healing Outside the Margins, and she developed a national training model for integrative patient navigation.

For more information about integrative cancer care, Carole recommends visiting the websites for the Smith Center for Healing & the Arts (SmithCenter.org), the Society for Integrative Oncology (IntegrativeONC.org), and the National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (cam.cancer.gov).