



WRITTEN BY
LYNNETTE M. EVENSON-ST. AMAND

tigue, etc.) will not only receive tailored medications, but a dietician to help evaluate their dietary needs. Though medications are a constant in today's cancer treatment, additional effective treatment modalities include heat and cold, relaxation techniques such as massage or music, imagery and distractions such as television or movies, hobbies or other activities.

Reactions to medications and treatments are as unique as the individual receiving the treatment. It takes a concise, open line of communication between the treated and those providing treatment to ensure the best course of medications and care. The proper balance of diet and medication are essential in order for cancer patients to keep up their strength and overall feelings of wellness.

Additionally, keeping a journal is an excellent way for patients and their families to accurately communicate how patients reacted to medications. The journal is a tool used to describe side effects from treatment and to track medication use and efficacy. Sharing this information with the healthcare team helps them find a course of medication that meets the needs of the patient allowing them to be as mobile as possible, and enjoy activities without feeling too drowsy, confused, or ill.

Many patients who have been diagnosed with cancer suffer needlessly in silence rather than seek help. Discussing side effects and symptoms with the healthcare team allows the team to review possible causes and treatment courses that will provide a good outcome with few or no added side effects. In healthcare, it is our goal to treat and improve our patients' quality of life, but the "team" is not complete without the valuable input from those who know our patients best—their loved ones.

Lynnette M. Evenson-St. Amand works with Valley Hospital and Medical Center, as well as Deaconess Hospital and Medical Center. She also teaches as adjunct faculty for the College of Pharmacy at Washington State University.

communicating through cancer

Does your Healthcare Team Know What you're Really Going Through?

FOR YEARS, THE WORD CANCER WAS USED IN whispers; it brought fear to the hearts of all around—it meant someone was dying. For those of us in healthcare, cancer certainly is considered a serious illness, but is also a treatable disease. Thankfully, with the advent of new medications and the attraction of highly trained oncology professionals to our area. Northwest cancer patients have available to them the best cancer care that our area has ever seen. Still, many cancer patients find themselves needlessly suffering during their journey through this disease for one simple reason—lack of communication.

In my profession, I have seen the effect that lack of communication can have on cancer patients. Many long bouts with cancer treatment side effects could have been downgraded or alleviated altogether, had patients communicated their symptoms with their healthcare team.

Area hospitals and clinics have highly skilled inpatient and outpatient units

devoted to the care of patients with cancer, from diagnosis through treatment. While the oncology healthcare teams have systems and practices in place that help determine what adjustments in care need to be made for each individual, it is imperative that patients and their families clearly, concisely, and regularly, discuss any bothersome side effects with their team. A poor appetite, trouble sleeping, or pain may not be "par for the course" with cancer. These issues could simply be a matter of reevaluating and adjusting medications.

The Northwest area medical community has worked very hard to educate physicians, pharmacists, and nurses in the appropriate use of a variety of medications used individually (or in combination) to control symptoms appropriately without leading to increased or unwanted side effects.

Patients who work closely with their healthcare team and who communicate any problems they are having (such as nausea, vomiting, pain, depression, fa-