

Gratitude: A Gift of Cancer

The holiday season is upon us. Many of our patients and their families are juggling their cancer and its treatment while much of the world around them is in a festive mood. It brings great clarity when we see this juxtaposition in play. And yet, the holidays also are a good time to take stock of the gifts experienced by those who have cancer and for those of us working with them.

Many survivors talk about the silver linings of having cancer—about being reminded of what truly is important. They are rarely things, but rather people we care about and time spent with them; small moments such as enjoying a beautiful day, cuddling on the couch watching a favorite TV show, taking a dog for a walk, or tucking a child into bed. It may lead us to ask ourselves whether we are living the lives we want to be leading. After cancer, the gap between the reality of our lives and our preferred lives may narrow and become more meaningful. It helps to remind us on an almost-daily basis about what is important in life and how quickly our lives can change when a life-threatening diagnosis is received. How unimportant the seemingly important becomes and how important the things we may take for granted really are.

Gratitude is defined as a feeling of thankfulness and appreciation for what one has. According to *Psychology Today* (n.d.), “Studies show that gratitude not only can be deliberately cultivated but can increase levels of well-being and happiness among those who do cultivate it. In addition, grateful thinking—and especially expression of it to others—is associated with increased levels of energy, optimism, and empathy.” What a great antidote to a hard day at work.

I am grateful for many things—actually, people and my relationships

After Cancer

by Genie Gravelin

We learn to take the “little things” in stride.

We concentrate on positive energy and the beauty that surrounds us.

We rush less, laugh more, and live with greater intensity.

Our focus shifts.

Material things become less important, and the people in our lives become more dear.

We derive our greatest pleasures from our relationships.

We become more tolerant of imperfections, and more appreciative of the special moments we share with the people we love.

We have a deeper understanding of how quickly the years pass, so we try to get as much as we can out of every day.

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with them. Having a wonderful daughter, my family who I am close to, and a network of friends that span the last 40 years of my life and crisscross the country all make my list. Most of those friends started out as colleagues that I met during Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) volunteer activities, and others started out as neighbors and became friends over time. When I dealt with my

own cancer, I felt as if all my family and friends connected to make a net that held me up and supported me during some difficult times (I hope I have been able to provide similar support to them when they have needed it). I also am grateful for my colleagues and students. We work together knowing we are all on the same team—one that is dedicated to improving cancer care for current and future patients.

I am grateful for all the authors who have stepped up to submit an article or column to the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, the reviewers volunteering their time to give feedback, the associate editors who produce interesting columns for each issue, and the ONS publishing staff who make it all happen.

Have you paused this holiday season to think about all that you are grateful for? Take a quiet moment and do so, and then share that gratitude with those close to you. In closing, I would like to share a poem that speaks to me about the gifts of cancer (see center sidebar).

On behalf of the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing's* associate editors and staff, we wish you a happy holiday season and a healthy new year.

Reference

Psychology Today. (n.d.). Psych basics: Gratitude. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/gratitude>

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