

I CAN NEWSLETTER

Fighting cancer through science, healthy living, and prevention

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About Texas Oncology

As an independent oncology practice, Texas Oncology is comprised of more than 300 physicians and more than 100 sites of service throughout Texas and southeastern Oklahoma and is a pioneer in community-based cancer care. Patients are treated with today's most advanced, effective cancer technologies and treatments, and have the opportunity to take part in some of the most promising clinical trials in the nation for new drugs and treatments for a broad range of cancers, near the support of family and friends. Texas Breast Specialists and Texas Urology Specialists are a part of Texas Oncology.

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Caring for Those With Cancer

The support of family and friends is critical in the fight against cancer. This issue of Texas Oncology's *I Can* newsletter focuses on caregivers and the vital, often unrecognized role they play in every cancer patient's treatment.

Giving Thanks for Caregivers

In this season of giving thanks, it's important to remember caregivers – the often unsung heroes of cancer care. Texas Oncology recognizes and appreciates the critical role that caregivers play throughout a cancer patient's journey. Caregivers sacrifice their own time, energy, resources, and emotions in support of their loved ones.

"Having a support system while undergoing treatment for cancer is not just nice, but a necessity," said Dr. Vance Esler, a hematologist at Texas Oncology–Amarillo. "Caregivers are indispensable in the fight against cancer."

More than 60 million Americans will serve as unpaid caregivers at one point during the year by providing assistance to a loved one. Caregiving occurs in many forms, from providing occasional transportation and housekeeping to 24/7 in-home care. While many patients have one primary caregiver, others rely on multiple volunteers. Old age, Alzheimer's, and cancer are the three most common conditions requiring caregivers.

"Caregivers are an integral part of a patient's healthcare team and make a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of their treatment."

– Ralph Heaven, M.D.
Medical Oncologist, Texas Oncology–Abilene

With 80 percent of all cancer treatment now delivered in an outpatient setting, assistance that used to be provided

by medical professionals in hospitals now largely falls on lay caregivers. Research indicates that most cancer-related caregivers spend more than eight hours a day tending patients receiving chemotherapy. In a sense, the caregiver is on a parallel journey with the cancer patient, but with more responsibility.

Caregivers assume numerous new roles, including "nurse," "financial manager," "psychologist," "housekeeper," and "personal assistant." This can create challenges for the caregiver, ranging from time management and juggling competing demands to financial hardship and physical and mental stress. In the process of assisting others, caregivers often neglect their own needs and the needs of their own family.

Caregivers are most effective and helpful when they are well rested and in a positive frame of mind. But when they take time for themselves, caregivers sometimes experience feelings of guilt or selfishness. These conflicting demands can lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and resentment. That's why it's so important for others to say thank you by offering assistance and help to caregivers.

"The caregiver's job is important, but so is her own physical and emotional health. Caregivers need to be sure to take time off – go home, get a good night's sleep, and take care of their own life too."

– Vance Esler, M.D.
Hematologist, Texas Oncology–Amarillo

This, of course, is easier said than done. Caregivers do what they do out of love and concern for others, which is a stronger motivator for them than money or self-serving interests. It's perfectly natural for concerned caregivers to place the needs of their patient ahead of themselves.

Their role is key and it's important to regularly express appreciation to those who make daily sacrifices for others. Take time to thank and do a good deed for caregivers. They deserve it.

Questions Every Caregiver Should Ask

By Sumalatha Patibandla, M.D.

Medical Oncologist, Texas Oncology–Beaumont

Q: What is a caregiver's role in a patient's treatment?

A: Caregivers are patient advocates. They should learn everything they can about the patient's diagnosis, treatment options, possible side effects, and advance care planning, to help the patient make treatment decisions. It is also critical to help the patient follow the chosen treatment plan, taking notes so information is recorded for later reference. Caregivers should ensure that patients attend all appointments and treatment sessions, and take medications as prescribed.

Q: What should caregivers do during a doctor's appointment?

A: Patients may be overwhelmed or not feeling good during doctor's appointments, so it's important for caregivers to take notes about the patient's diagnosis and instructions from doctors or nurses. It is also important to write down questions for the doctor or nurse in advance of appointments.

Q: What impact do caregivers have on a patient's cancer treatment?

A: Caregivers have a significant positive impact on the outcome of a patient's cancer treatment. Caregivers should encourage patients to follow doctor's orders and help ensure that the patient's medical team has all of the information needed to best treat the patient.



Care for Yourself While Caring For Others

It is easy for caregivers to become so focused on tending to their patients that they neglect to care for themselves. Caregivers play a key role in taking care of the physical and emotional well-being of the patient, and it is crucial that they also take care of themselves during this time.

Here are some ways to take care of yourself:

Take Care of Your Body and Mind:

Be your best so you can do your best

- Find time to exercise, even just a quick 30-minute walk
- Follow a healthy diet
- Find social time to enjoy your friends
- Get enough sleep

Find Support:

Don't do it alone

- Know it is ok to ask for help and seek professional help, if needed
- Find a support group
- Accept assistance – let family and friends help cook, clean, shop, or spend the day with the patient
- Take time away from caregiving, respite care can offer assistance to allow time away

Cope With Your Feelings:

It is ok to feel a range of emotions

- Think positively
- Search for acceptance
- Connect with others
- Laugh

“Reach out and share everything – all the good and bad times. Let the people who want to love you, love you.”

– Fredalyn Everett
Caregiver, Abilene





Caregiving: True Friendship

Caregivers, whether they are spouses, parents, children, or friends, make a tremendous difference in the lives of cancer patients. After more than a decade of friendship, Texas Oncology–Amarillo patient Barbara Warf and her caregiver, Violet Parsons, are more than just friends, they are like family. When Barbara was diagnosed with lymphoma, Violet and her husband knew they wouldn't let her go through it alone.

"I don't have family nearby and Violet's help has meant that I have been able to stay in my own home," said Barbara. "Violet goes with me to all my treatments and makes sure that I have food to eat. She is my angel."

Violet attends doctor's appointments with Barbara, drives her to and from treatments, and calls her everyday to make sure she is okay. Violet and her husband even scheduled a recent vacation between Barbara's chemotherapy sessions, so that they would not miss any of her treatments. Barbara is quick to say what a difference Violet has made and how thankful she is for her care and friendship.

"Barbara says that she couldn't do this without me, but I don't know what I would do without HER – she is my best friend," said Violet Parsons. "This is what you do for someone you love and I know she would do the same for me."



Barbara Warf and Violet Parsons

Being Prepared to Care

Stepping into the role of a caregiver can be an overwhelming task, but there are ways to help ease the anxiety.

Texas Oncology suggests these tips for new caregivers:

- Talk to the patient about their medical care and how you can best help
- Understand and respect your loved one's wishes
- Educate yourself about the patient's condition using credible resources
- Communicate with the patient, doctor, and other family members
- Think positively
- Be a good listener
- Involve others and delegate caregiving responsibilities
- Stay organized

Say Thank You to a Caregiver

Saying thank you and recognizing the efforts of caregivers is an important way others can provide support during cancer treatment.

Take time to show thanks to a caregiver with one of these ideas:

1. Say "thank you"
2. Give a day off – guilt free
3. Do something together that you both enjoy
4. Drop off supplies for a favorite hobby (such as knitting yarn or a new book)
5. Invite his/her children for a play date
6. Pick up extra groceries on your next shopping trip
7. Talk about something other than cancer
8. Put together a package for writing notes, including stamps, pens, and assorted note cards
9. Ask for a list and run errands
10. Organize and schedule other friends to provide dinner
11. Mow the lawn
12. Donate house cleaning services or offer your own services
13. Leave a basket of muffins or cookies by the front door
14. Provide a favorite movie for the caregiver and patient to enjoy together
15. Stay in touch and be a good listener

Visit www.TexasOncology.com/GivingThanks for more ways to say thank you to a caregiver.