

Why Reaching Out to Cancer Patients Everywhere Is Important

Cancer patients and their families need support. A cancer diagnosis is scary, and the cancer journey can be long and arduous. There are generally questions, fears, anxieties, myths to debunk, doubts, grief, regrets, etc.

Here are five reasons why reaching out to cancer patients is important:

Health care is still in crisis. People continue to struggle with every aspect of it, including access and cost, the government and how much is enough.

- In the past decade, Medicare costs have more than doubled – from \$224 billion in 2000 to **\$555 billion in 2011**. And that is before an estimated 80 million Baby Boomers began turning 65 from 2012-2015. The population is outstripping the system.
- Health care not funded by private individuals, or those with insurance that will not pay, will no longer be available. The natural place for it to fall is onto the church, from where health care first sprang.

Cancer diagnoses are increasing. The leading cancer research organizations in America released a study in 2000 indicating that the number of Americans diagnosed with cancer each year will double by 2050.¹

- In 2000, about 1.3 million people annually received a cancer diagnosis. By mid-century, experts predict that the number will have increased to 2.6 million annually.

The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2013, 1.6 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer and more than 580,000 will die of cancer.²

- CNN is reporting that cancer has surpassed heart disease to become the leading cause of death among Hispanics in the United States, according to a recently released American Cancer Society report.

Cancer patients/families want spiritual support. Two studies done between 2007-2009 and published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* addressed the spiritual needs of cancer patients.

- The first showed there is a strong desire for spiritual support on the part of cancer patients. **But of the 88 percent who considered religion to be at least somewhat important, nearly half said their spiritual needs were not being met by their religious community and 72 percent felt those needs were similarly unaddressed by the medical system.**³

¹ American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, North American Association of Central Cancer Registries. (2000). Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, 1973-1999. *Cancer*, 94:2766-2792.

² American Cancer Society. (2013). *Cancer Facts & Figures*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society.

³ Balboni, T., Vanderwerker, L., Block, S. D., Paulk, M., Lathan, C., Peteet, J., and Prigerson, H. (2007). "Religiousness and Spiritual Support Among Advanced Cancer Patients and Associations with End-of-Life Treatment Preferences and Quality of Life." *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 25:550-560.

- The second study concluded that among terminally ill cancer patients, when the spiritual needs were supported by the medical team, there was greater hospice utilization and, among high religious copers, better patient quality of life near death.⁴

Cancer patients and their families are vulnerable, facing major life questions and issues.

- The Institute of Medicine has published that cancer patients have seven critical psychosocial needs.⁵ They are:
 - Information on cancer and its treatments
 - Help in coping with emotions related to cancer
 - Material and logistical resources
 - Help in managing disruptions in work, school and family
 - Assistance in changing behaviors
 - Help in managing the illness
 - Financial advice and assistance
- An article in *US News & World Report* on July 23, 2012, stated that cancer patients ages 14-39 are more likely to report unmet social, psychological and informational needs.⁶

The church should show Jesus to cancer patients and their families – attend to their needs, minister to them, care for their souls and open the doors of the church community to them.

⁴ Balboni, T., Paulk, M., Balboni, M. P., Loggers, E., Wright, A., Block, S., and Prigerson, H. (2010). "Provision of Spiritual Care to Patients With Advanced Cancer: Associations With Medical Care and Quality of Life Near Death." *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 28:445-452.

⁵ Institute of Medicine. (2008). *Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Health Needs*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

⁶ HealthDay. (2012, July 23). "Young Cancer Patients Often Lack Support: Study." Retrieved Oct. 1, 2013, from *US News & World Report*: <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/news/articles/2012/07/23/young-cancer-patients-often-lack-support-study>.