

## GiveForward Empowers Cancer Patients & Families

BY ARIANA VARGAS



In the United States the average out-of-pocket expenses for cancer during the first year of treatment total \$8,500.<sup>1</sup> A recent Duke study revealed that more than 50 percent of Americans could not come up with \$2,000 in a pinch if needed.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, a huge disparity exists between patients' payment expectations and what they can actually afford. This gap forces many families to prioritize cancer treatment and ensure that co-pays and high deductibles are paid first—often putting other living expenses on high-interest credit cards. The end result is often bankruptcy for these cancer patients and families. In fact, 62 percent of all bankruptcies in this country are directly caused by medical debt.<sup>3</sup> Cancer patients, specifically, are four times more likely than the average American to declare bankruptcy within five years of remission.<sup>4</sup>

GiveForward ([www.GiveForward.com](http://www.GiveForward.com)) is an online resource dedicated to resolving this problem. By providing free online fundraising pages, GiveForward helps cancer patients and their families empower themselves financially. Since launching in 2008, GiveForward has helped more than 20,000 families raise more than \$23 million to help pay the out-of-pocket expenses that direct aid does not cover. GiveForward has been called: "The future of medical fundraising in the internet age." CNN reported that GiveForward is "reinventing healthcare."

What is most important to us at GiveForward, however, is that we have become an online community-building arena. Our integration with social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, allows patients


and their families to exponentially increase the number of people in a patient's support network. Visitors to a GiveForward fundraising page can sign up to receive updates and stay current on a friend or family member's progress. Unlike traditional patient blogging sites, GiveForward also enables visitors to give directly to the patient.

Because funds donated to a patient's page are used at the patient's discretion, GiveForward differs greatly from most forms of direct aid offered today. One patient may need money to supplement lost income while she recovers from a double mastectomy, while another person may need money to cover daycare for his children while he cares for a parent with lymphoma. GiveForward is revolutionary because we provide the means for friends and family to help a loved one facing a medical crisis without eligibility requirements or a formal application process. If someone has a need that friends and family deem worthy, GiveForward provides the platform to request assistance.

Today GiveForward is the #1 online fundraising platform for medical expenses in the country. We are the only platform that provides personal fundraising coaches to every single user on the site. Upon publishing a page, users are sent the photograph, email address, and direct phone number of a GiveForward fundraising coach who can assist them with issues ranging from technical questions (i.e., how to upload a photo) to more complex strategies (i.e., how to maintain momentum for an online fundraiser).

Our advocates appear in more than 650

hospitals nationwide. Social workers, case managers, admissions officers, financial counselors, and discharge planners are just some of the many hospital workers who share our information with patients. However, most referrals come by word-of-mouth. Our GiveForward users frequently express that the emotional support received through donation comments of love and encouragement meant more than the money itself. This positive endorsement is often enough to motivate a friend or family member to start another page.

GiveForward is focused on staying at the forefront of technology. We are constantly changing our site by adding enhancements and innovative features. The ability to manage your fundraiser via a mobile device and make online payments with credit cards, debit cards, and PayPal mean that it's never been easier to give to a loved one in need. We are committed to listening to patient and caregiver needs and leveraging feedback to continually evolve our service. As a result, GiveForward is the easiest and most effective way to provide emotional and financial support to a loved one facing cancer. 

—Ariana Vargas is director of Business Development, GiveForward, Chicago, Ill.

### References

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