

Creating a Circle of Care

BY ROSALIE CANOSA, LCSW-R

The impact of a cancer diagnosis on a patient, family, and the people that are close to them is profound. Everyday practical activities involved with coordinating a family life must take a back seat to the immediate needs of the individual with cancer. But caregivers and patients need to know that there are resources and organizations to help.

CancerCare has a strong commitment to caregivers—recognizing they are the safety net for people coping with cancer. Established in 1944, CancerCare's core services include counseling, financial assistance, education, and training. Counseling services are delivered by phone, online, and face to face. Between 1,500–2,000 calls come into our national toll-free helpline each week. Last fiscal year, CancerCare provided more than \$5 million in financial assistance to more than 32,000 individuals and families. We also offer Connect Education Workshops, which can be listened to live, or as podcasts. Last fiscal year, we reached more than 50,000 individuals through these workshops. Finally, CancerCare has a robust library of cancer-related publications. In total, we distributed 1.2 million of our publications last fiscal year. All of our services are provided free of charge.

My Cancer Circle was created by Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc., in collaboration with CancerCare. The tool is powered by Lotsa Helping Hands. My Cancer Circle is an online caring community that offers a practical solution for people struggling with multiple demands

related to cancer diagnosis, cancer treatment, and managing activities of daily living. In short, My Cancer Circle answers the question: *What can I do to help?*

And there is always so much to be done. Sometimes tasks are practical, such as cooking meals, helping with household chores, walking a dog, or grocery shopping. Often there are childcare-related needs. Still other tasks are related to cancer treatment, such as taking the patient to medical appointments or simply sitting with the patient in the infusion center. My Cancer Circle is a simple online tool to help organize the community of people who want to help and the tasks that need to be completed.

Launched on May 31, 2012, at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in Chicago, My Cancer Circle (<http://mycancercircle.net>) allows a person—the primary caregiver of someone within their circle of care—to create a My Cancer Circle community. It takes only a few minutes to set up the community. Users have the option to allow one “coordinator” to oversee the community or to identify several coordinators who are then assigned to manage specific tasks. For example, one coordinator might organize activities around medical appointments. Another coordinator might handle communication-related tasks, such as emails and updates. Still another coordinator might be adept at locating resources and information. My Cancer Circle allows coordinators to assign specific tasks to people so that families and caregivers can focus on what's



really important—caring for their loved one with cancer. The resource is entirely customizable based on individual needs and personal circumstances.

My Cancer Circle is easy for people to use and access. The calendar is color-coordinated to clearly flag where there is a need, when and to what individual a task is assigned, and when a task or need has been met. It provides reminders to people who have committed to tasks. In addition, the My Cancer Circle website links directly to CancerCare's services, such as financial assistance, counseling, support groups, or education workshops.

Within one month of the launch of My Cancer Circle, more than 50 cancer communities have been created. Today, CancerCare and Boehringer Ingelheim are working to connect people to this new resource in every way possible. Through CancerCare's helpline, we hear from people who are overwhelmed and who can benefit from this resource. Oftentimes, people facing cancer feel alone and that there is no help available to them. Others have strong support networks and it's just a question of organizing or matching people to tasks that are most critical. No matter what the situation, My Cancer Circle can help.

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