



## What Makes a Successful Cancer Information Center?

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INCREASINGLY, cancer programs are establishing cancer information centers to provide access to information about cancer. Cancer affects more than patients—the disease also affects families and communities who need information to help them better support their loved ones. Cancer information centers help patients and families access appropriate services. In addition, these centers serve as an access point for the community on prevention and screening programs. Below, coordinators from two cancer information centers share their experiences.



Jill Bokern, R.N., is CIRCLE Coordinator at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Mo.

Since its January 1993 opening, CIRCLE (the Cancer Information and Resource Center for Life and Education) has provided counseling, extensive cancer education and resource materials, ongoing support programs, and referral services for clients and their families and/or significant others, as well as for health professionals and the community.

A cancer information center must, of course, provide supportive

and educational services necessary for patients to understand their disease and tolerate treatment. However, other primary objectives should include:

1. helping patients maintain dignity and quality of life throughout all aspects of their cancer experience.
2. providing direction and support to patients and their families through all phases of care and minimizing confusion and anxiety.
3. establishing networking opportunities with other cancer patients, families, and members of the community.
4. providing continuing education through seminars for patients, their families, health professionals/volunteers, and the community.
5. promoting use of the resource center by health professionals.

It is also important to note what a cancer information and resource program is *not* intended to do. The program is not intended to interfere with the physician/patient relationship. It should not attempt to be an authority on all aspects of cancer, nor limit clients' options to seek other sources of cancer information and support.

Choose an area for the resource and information center that offers easy access. CIRCLE is on the first floor of the ambulatory care building, which houses Barnes-Jewish

Hospital's radiation department, outpatient surgery, physician offices, and medical and surgical practices.

At CIRCLE, a registered nurse (myself) acts as coordinator of the program. A strong knowledge of cancer allows me to facilitate personalized and appropriate assistance to clients who are in various stages of their workup and/or treatment. I assist in the coordination of continuing educational seminars not only for clients but also for hospital staff and volunteers. I also developed both a program and a training manual.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of a successful resource center. At CIRCLE, volunteers are carefully selected and attend educational sessions that focus on active learning principles; comfort-giving techniques; knowledge of materials, resources, and information available within CIRCLE or the medical center; and most importantly, the ethics of maintaining patient confidentiality at all times.

A great challenge is to disseminate word about support services to patients, families, the health care team, other cancer agencies, and the community. The first step is to network and develop a rapport with other area cancer agencies, such as the American Cancer Society, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Y-ME, and the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations, for example. We listed information about CIRCLE in the St. Louis Metropolitan district's *The American Cancer Society's Resource, Information, and Guidance Directory*.

As CIRCLE's coordinator, I met with other local cancer information centers at hospitals in St. Louis and surrounding areas and attended nursing staff meetings where I distributed information about services available. Nursing

divisions receive a monthly calendar of cancer-related programs and services available at the hospital. Members of the Physician Advisory Board and staff physicians were made aware of services and received referral cards.

Early on, the Barnes-Jewish Hospital's marketing department developed a logo and pamphlet to provide information regarding CIRCLE and available services. The pamphlet was distributed throughout the hospital and was included in the admission information packet given to the oncology division's patients.

CIRCLE developed its own cancer facts pamphlets. Because the hospital provides services to Russian immigrants, CIRCLE pamphlets were translated into Russian. Many pharmaceutical companies have been willing to provide educational materials to the center.

Comfortable seating, good lighting, and bookcases are important. At CIRCLE, information and pamphlets are displayed on card racks provided by the hospital's gift shop. A book cart and corner desk were provided by the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Auxiliary, and a television and VCR were donated. The video library has grown from 20 to more than 120 videos. Topics range from cancer treatment and detailed information about the disease to beauty guides. Audiotapes donated to CIRCLE include guides to relaxation, imagery, and focusing on wellness.

Patients appreciate the gift of a free wig. Wigs By Paula, Inc., of South Easton, Mass., and our local wig shops donate wigs to our program. The Barnes-Jewish Hospital's Auxiliary provides free turbans to patients undergoing treatment.

Staff members step out of the physical site and into the community to provide cancer awareness and health promotion activities at high schools, health fairs, senior centers, and colleges of nursing. In 1995 more than 6,500 people attended hospital-sponsored health fairs, seminars, and educational programs. CIRCLE often promotes national cancer-related programs to the hospital's employees.

With funding from the Auxiliary, CIRCLE worked with LIFT (Literacy Investment For Tomorrow) to implement the HEAL (Health

Education and Adult Literacy) program throughout Missouri. Developed by World Education in Boston, Mass., HEAL focuses on the inclusion of early detection and control of breast and cervical cancer information into adult basic education programs.



*Theresa Waters, R.N., B.S.N., O.C.N., is community cancer education coordinator at Memorial Medical Center in Springfield, Ill.*

In my role as community cancer education coordinator, I extend the cancer center's program outside the hospital, first assessing community needs and then involving community members. We have had the most success when working with various community organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, the local school system, and the public health department. We have also had success extending our message at local corporate health fairs.

A big component of my job is community presentations, speaking to churches, schools, and civic organizations about cancer prevention and detection. One of our major efforts is working with a citywide committee on smoking prevention aimed at area fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. I visit the classroom and educate these students about health issues related to tobacco. In conjunction with this education, we also sponsor an art contest for the most creative student-designed antismoking message. The winner has his or her artwork and school name displayed on

roadside billboards within Sangamon County. This project actually originated from a student's concern about a lack of billboards promoting *not* smoking. A financial grant through the Sangamon County Public Health Department has allowed for the use of seven billboards for a period of three months.

I also serve on a committee for the Springfield Public School District, revising the health curriculum for grades seven through twelve. We are now reviewing textbooks and looking at a variety of computer software appropriate for this age group.

An important component of Memorial Medical Center's mission is to improve the health status of the community in which we serve. To meet this goal, the cancer center conducts yearly cancer screenings, which I coordinate, including follow-up for all participants who test positive.

Another component of my job is to perform literature searches for the public as well as for physicians and other health care professionals. Through the Internet I can access current research protocols and find the eligibility criteria for enrollment. I also fulfill patient requests for information about specific cancers and treatment.

Memorial's Cancer Information Line, which is my office telephone number, is available to anyone who has a cancer-related question. Each day I receive a variety of calls from patients as well as from health care professionals who want to know more about any aspect of cancer, including resources in the central Illinois area.

As an information and resource center, we are continually exploring new opportunities to provide more than just clinical information to our community. Recently the Springfield Art Association contacted us to help coordinate a program for the 1997 National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. We are working with them to organize an art show featuring works by artists who portray the complex feelings of breast cancer survivors. The artwork will be displayed at various sites throughout the area as well as in our hospital, and will be accompanied by educational programs on breast cancer. ☐