



Association of Community Cancer Centers

ONCOLOGY ISSUES

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FROM THE EDITOR.....

Go Viral with Compassion and Kindness

BY JENNIE R. CREWS, MD, MMM, FACP,
AND KRISTA NELSON, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C, BCD



As we approach the sixth month of the SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) pandemic, so much has changed about the way we work and live. Screening,

masking, testing, and virtual meetings and appointments are standard operating procedure. We now turn our attention to the future and wonder how long these procedures will remain routine, whether immunity from exposure or from a vaccine will become a reality, and how we will survive the psychological and economic toll of COVID-19. The fear and uncertainty related to the spread of COVID-19 is real, and we are all feeling it, both personally and professionally. We are being called upon to support each other and our patients in new and different ways.

Dealing with such uncertainty is daunting for many of us, but I am reminded that our patients have faced uncertainty long before there was COVID-19. A diagnosis of cancer suddenly shifts the futures that our patients imagined for themselves and their families. The effects of cancer and its treatment limit their participation in activities they once enjoyed. The cost of cancer care threatens their financial security. Now many of us are experiencing some of these same losses.

What can those experiencing cancer and its overwhelming unpredictability teach us about dealing with COVID-19?

- Take a moment to mindfully identify what emotion you are feeling.
- Acknowledge that we all need help sometimes. We chose oncology because we are givers. Givers have a hard time being receivers, but asking for help is not a sign of weakness or an imposition.
- Find connection. Stay connected to family, friends, and co-workers and don't worry alone. Share and listen to concerns, communicate openly, and provide

professional services that support one another. Some cancer programs are offering peer counselors, care packages, video support groups, and special break areas.

- Embrace activities to alleviate anxiety, such as meditation, exercise, music, art, or creative hobbies.
- Consider limiting social media and news after 6:00 pm. These can trigger worry and impact sleep.
- Focus on what you can control. Slow down and consider what you *can* do, or focus on, in this moment to help you feel better. This may be your breath, a gratitude practice, or helping a neighbor.
- If you feel overwhelmed, seek out resources in human resources or community programs to provide financial counseling and emotional support.

Resources are also available from national organizations. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers online resources on coping with stress, helping children cope, and reducing stigma at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers tools like *Coping with Stress During an Infectious Disease Outbreak* (store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4885.pdf) and *Taking Care of Your Mental Health During an Infectious Disease Outbreak* (samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf). Share the resources you find most useful by posting them to ACCCeXchange at accc-cancer.org/COVID-19.

Our challenge is to remember to be gentle with each other and ourselves while acknowledging that we are suffering alongside our community. One unique outcome from our shared experience with COVID-19 is that we may now understand a cancer patient's perspective in a new way. This trying time will likely bring our community closer than ever. Let our compassion and kindness be the energy that goes viral in our community. 