

Partnership in Care. American Cancer Society Volunteers Needed

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 26 June 2015 01:38



“Cancer doesn’t care, we do,” reads the sign that hangs on the door of the American Cancer Society’s Resource Center that is housed in the New Mexico Cancer Center. Volunteers man the office that helps cancer patients and their families navigate the dark stretches of the cancer highway.

Joyce Graves, volunteer, explains there is a partnership between the cancer center and ACS. The cancer center provides an office, phones, a computer and Xeroxing capabilities while ACS provides educational booklets and trained volunteers.

Patient Services

The volunteers are trained to help patients and their families find answers to the multitude of questions that arise when a cancer diagnosis is made.

One of the booklets available is entitled “Listen With Your Heart.” This book helps caregivers learn how to talk with the patient. Another, “Talking with Your Doctor” gives helpful tips about asking all the right questions of a healthcare provider.

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There are booklets specifically designed for breast cancer, prostate cancer, lymphoma and many other topics. "Cooking Smart" gives guidelines for cancer prevention. Some suggestions are: get to and stay at a healthy weight, be physically active, eat a variety of foods with emphasis on plant sources and limit alcoholic beverages.

Another resource offered through the program is availability of wigs, scarfs, hats and turbans for people who have lost their hair or stay cold as a result of their treatments. The cancer center provides a large closet for the ACS to store these things for the patients.

ACS offers a lodging program to those who travel for medical services. If the trip is planned in advance, the ACS volunteers can help find free lodging for the patient and caregiver.

When funds are available, there are prosthetics and bras for breast cancer patients who have undergone mastectomies. They also have a program called Reach to Recovery where trained breast cancer survivors visit with newly diagnosed patients in an effort to support them.

Graves said the best thing about their services is it is "one less thing for the patient and the family to deal with."

Volunteering

Clara Enriquez has been volunteering with ACS the past four years. A cancer survivor herself, Enriquez says, "I'm giving a little back in gratitude for the healing God gave me." She says she has met some great people at the cancer center. She is amazed that people who are in great pain, have the compassion to worry about her.

Enriquez volunteers for the same shifts each week so she has developed a relationship with many of the people she helps. She said she has seen grown men cry at the diagnosis of their wives.

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“It’s just amazing to me to see the hope, the faith and the strength people have even though they know they’re dying,” Enriquez said.

Volunteers Needed

The group would like to start opening on Wednesdays but they don’t have enough help. Volunteers go through about three hours of preliminary training. Another day they do a shadowing process so they feel comfortable with answering questions and tending patient’s needs. After the training, they are asked to donate from five to ten hours per month at the cancer center.

Beverly Crowe helped write the training program for ACS’s Great West Division and is the training chair for ACS in Gallup. She says it’s hard to tell somebody why they should volunteer because everybody has their own personal reasons.

“Most cancer survivors had help going thru this, so they want to help somebody else,” she said.

But you don’t have to be a survivor to volunteer. The major requirements for volunteers are caring and compassion. Of course, you have to be dependable and it helps to have good communication skills.

Other Needs

Donating gas cards is a great way to help patients who have to travel to Albuquerque for tests or treatments. Money is also needed for prosthetics and bras for mastectomy patients. Other items that are helpful are crocheted caps and scarves, baseball caps and other head coverings. These items can be donated to the New Mexico Cancer Center located at 2240 College Drive in Gallup.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact Beverly Crowe at 505-726-0808 or email

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