

Script – Print - Finding Support during Cancer Support Groups Offer Hope, Understanding and Knowledge

Facing a cancer diagnosis is filled with many uncertainties. There are a number of questions regarding medical appointments, treatments, ability to work and managing issues at home. That doesn't even factor in the emotional issues of dealing with a serious health crisis.

That's where support groups can help. Support groups bring together people who are going through or have gone through similar experiences. A support group provides space for people to share their own experiences, feelings, coping strategies, and personal knowledge about diseases, in this case cancer, and treatments.

Jillayne Deno knows firsthand the importance of good support. In November 2018 she was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer at age 39. She went through six rounds of chemotherapy and a year of targeted therapy. The one thing missing from her journey, however, was a support group. So when she finished her treatment, Jillayne wanted to help others traveling a similar path.

“When I was offered the oncology nurse navigator position with OSF HealthCare I decided as one of my goals was to start a cancer support group for our community,” said Jillayne Deno, oncology nurse navigator, OSF HealthCare. “I identified it as something that was lacking in our community and it was definitely something that was needed. I went in and sat in on a few support groups in hospitals to see how they ran their programs, and then I built our program to mimic what a lot of the other facilities were doing.”

According to Mayo Clinic, there are many benefits of participating in a support group, including:

- Feeling less lonely and isolated
- Improving understanding of a disease and your own experience with it
- Reducing distress, depression, and anxiety
- Talking openly and honestly about your feelings
- Getting practical feedback about treatment options
- Learning about health, economic or social resources

“There's always support, always hope and joining together with other people and building those relationships to support each other; it's very therapeutic whether you're early on diagnosis or you're a 20-year survivor,” said Jillayne Deno, oncology nurse navigator, OSF HealthCare.

With concerns about meeting in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, many support groups took a break from meeting in person. Others have turned to virtual meetings, which allow participants to meet from the comfort of home while still supporting one another in recovery and survivorship.

“I think some people are willing to reach out in person because you can read people better in person than you can online,” said Jillayne Deno, oncology nurse navigator, OSF HealthCare. “But I’m hoping to visually see each other with the online platform – that we’ll still have that ability to reach out and read each other’s emotions and see what each other’s needs are, where they’re struggling and to support each other.”

Deno suggests trying a support group for a few weeks and letting your doctor know that you are getting the added support. If you don’t feel comfortable sharing your story with the group, you may benefit by listening to others at first. If you don’t feel comfortable, there may be other options for you to explore.

“I want people to know they’re never alone. No one has to do cancer alone,” said Jillayne Deno, oncology nurse navigator, OSF HealthCare. “It doesn’t matter what kind of support they have at home. The cancer support group is built for people like us, people like you that have been through cancer who have felt those emotions that only a cancer survivor can feel.”

For more information on support groups, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).