

CANCER CONVERSATIONS
BY: Melissa Jeremiah, RN, CHCE
Director of Hoosier Uplands Home Health and Hospice

With the holidays upon us, many people will be coming into contact with family members and friends who have recently been diagnosed with cancer, or are battling cancer. As a two year breast cancer survivor I feel compelled to give some conversation tips to friends and family, as well as those who are battling cancer. These are based on my own experience, and are not meant to work in every situation.

Advice to family and friends of those battling cancer:

- 1. Let your loved one guide the conversation. Some days a person wants to discuss cancer and some days they want to take part in cancer free conversations.**
- 2. If your loved one has always been an avid sports fan and loves to talk about football, for example, then start your conversation there. I so appreciated the conversations that were just normal conversations.**
- 3. If you are not going to be seeing your loved one over the holiday, send a card. I very much appreciated all the cards I got from my friends and family. It helped to know that others were praying for me and keeping me in their thoughts.**
- 4. If your loved one has always enjoyed talking on the phone, give them a call. But let them guide your telephone conversation, just like you would in person.**
- 5. Don't take it personal if your loved one doesn't feel like taking part in the festivities. There are times, for example, when I only wanted to be around my husband, Jeff, and our children, as they were my safe place.**
- 6. Don't take it personal if your loved one doesn't answer their e-mail as promptly as they used to.**
- 7. Respect your loved ones privacy. Do not ask prying, personal questions, especially if you do not know someone very well.**
- 8. Take dinner over to your loved one.**

Advice to those battling cancer:

- 1. Lead the conversation, if you want to have a cancer free conversation, then speak about the things you want to talk about. It sometimes puts others at ease to know they can just talk about everyday things.**
- 2. Don't take it personal if your friend, family member, acquaintances, or even complete strangers say things that are inappropriate, some people when they are not sure of what to say may say the most inappropriate things.**
- 3. Don't take it personal if your loved ones do not speak with you as much as they once did. Some people are not sure what to say, so they do not say as much.**
- 4. Get rid of the negativity. If there are people that bring you down, decrease your time with them. Increase the time with those who bring you up. Don't be afraid to speak up and say that you only want to hear positive things. We made it crystal clear to our family and friends that we only wanted to hear positive stories and never anything negative regarding cancer. You may need to have someone assigned as your censor. Jeff, served as my censor and would remove me from situations where there was negativity. For example: if a cancer commercial came on TV he would change the channel, if a person was telling of a negative cancer experience he would say we have to go, or that we do not want to hear anything but positive experiences. Jeff also did not let me stay negative for long. He would let me talk about my feelings, but would not let me dwell in negativity.**
- 6. Give some thought to how much you feel comfortable sharing with others. Because once you share your experiences, some people feel this gives them carte blanche to ask you some very personal questions.**
- 7. E-mail is a wonderful way to relay how you are doing, as you can pick the days you want to deal with cancer conversations.**
- 8. Above all do not compare yourself to others. No two people get the exact same treatment and all it does is cause doubt about your treatment.**