

Understanding the Intricacies of Cancer Survivor Treatment

Surviving cancer is a monumental milestone, and for many, the journey doesn't end with remission. Cancer survivor treatment involves a complex, ongoing process of monitoring, managing long-term side effects and addressing the emotional and psychological aftermath of the disease. As survival rates improve, thanks to early detection and advanced therapies, the focus is shifting toward understanding what it means to truly support survivors through recovery and beyond.

Here, Kyle Youngflesh, DO, a palliative medicine physician for Salinas Valley Health, discusses the multifaceted nature of post-cancer care—highlighting the medical, emotional, and lifestyle considerations essential to helping survivors thrive in their new normal.

The “Before Cancer” to “After Cancer” Timeline

Cancer survivorship can be defined in different way. Some consider a person a survivor from the moment of diagnosis, while others reserve the term for those who have completed treatment and are considered cancer-free. Support services are available at all stages, yet individuals who have finished treatment often face a unique set of concerns specific to life after cancer.

In his work, Dr. Youngflesh witnesses the “before cancer” and “after cancer” timeline. “When someone gets a cancer diagnosis, I'm often involved in some of these early moments of folks digesting that, and it's a point that really transforms someone's life,” he notes. “Even when treatment has ended, their life is still much different than it was before. Often, there's been huge changes in folks' lives, in their day-to-day, their relationships, their work and their health. So, when we think about the needs of cancer survivors, we're taking into account all of the different dimensions that may have been affected and try to help patients navigate and continue on.”

Cancer Survivorship Program at Salinas Valley Health

The survivorship program is being developed to provide more centralized support for patients after cancer treatment. While departments like oncology, palliative care, rehab services, nutrition, and the Cancer Resource Center remain available, patients typically have less contact with them post-treatment. The survivorship program aims to help patients understand their medical history and create a follow-up care plan, including screening and coordination with their primary care doctor for ongoing needs.

“One beautiful thing about our health system is that it's a really wonderful community of physicians and providers, where it's very easy for us to get in contact with each other. For example, to quickly check in with an oncologist if something is unclear,” shares Dr. Youngflesh. “The Cancer Resource Center is a good continuing point of contact if a survivor has questions about what should be happening or who they should talk to about a given issue.”

Factoring In the Mental Health Component of Cancer Survivorship

Salinas Valley Health collaborates with Mood Health for psychotherapy services, an essential element of cancer survivorship. Many patients have an overwhelming fear that their cancer will return, and these services offer assistance in working through that.

“I think normalizing those anxieties and concerns can be really powerful. In my experience, both in my personal and professional life, I see again and again that in tough times, it's often the feeling of being alone in a difficult experience like this that is really damaging to one's health,” notes Dr. Youngflesh.

Expert, Compassionate Care

While a cancer diagnosis is devastating, there is hope for survival. With the advancements in cancer treatment and treatment technologies, patients have viable options. Dr. Youngflesh wants patients who come to Salinas Valley Health to know that they have the best team on their side.

“Our hope as a care team is to acknowledge patients' unique needs and concerns. We work diligently to recognize the particularities of any given person's experience and do what we can to support and help navigate their journey, from the diagnosis to their cancer survivorship existence.”

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