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Health Matters: Cancer Support Groups

Triston Sanders - Medical Anchor

A diagnosis of cancer in the past meant isolation, at least in the mind of the patient, but support groups can help people affected by cancer feel less alone and can improve their ability to deal with the uncertainties and challenges that the disease brings.

One local woman is willing to share her struggle with cancer to show others the power of cancer support groups.

Nine years ago Patsy Kitchens was devastated when she received some birthday news she was not expecting.

"I found out on my 45th birthday that I had breast cancer."

Patsy joined a local cancer support group to help her deal with her illness, and because that group helped her so much, she eventually became a facilitator of a group herself.

Patsy says, "We don't know why we have to go through these things in our lives, but maybe it's so that we can encourage others, and I really kind of follow that."

Support groups offer educational advice as well as coping skills. They can also be specific for the type of cancer the patient has.

Dr. David Cho, radiation oncologist, says, "It helps patients cope with their cancer better, it helps them learn about their cancer. There's no shame in talking about side effect problems or questions about your cancer."

And they offer something else that you can only find from other people who understand what you are going through.

"We are blessed in that we have known and have faced our own mortality and know what it's like to live each day as if you were dying."

There are support groups for everyone. Some groups are just for patients, others are for family members, and then some groups encourage families and friends to participate along with the cancer patient or survivor.

For more information on cancer support groups in your local area, contact the American Cancer Society at 800-ACS-2345 or talk to your oncologist.

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