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Being a Cancer Advocate [1]

Listen to theCancer.Net Podcast: Being a Cancer Advocate[2], adapted from this content.

A person who has been affected by cancer often wants to make a difference in the lives of people with the disease by becoming a cancer advocate. It can be a positive and empowering experience to help others by providing support to those living with cancer, raising public awareness, advancing cancer research, improving the quality of cancer care, and addressing legislative and regulatory issues that affect cancer care and research. Advocating for others also provides a forum to share stories [3] about dealing with the cancer experience.

There are many ways to be a cancer advocate, working to improve the lives of people with cancer.

Getting started

It's important to research different advocacy opportunities to determine how your interests, skills, and abilities may be best put to use. The following are advocacy activities that you can consider:

Supporting others. Cancer survivors often want to reach out to others with cancer and help guide them through the cancer experience by supporting, listening, and sharing their own personal stories. This can involve speaking or visiting with someone who is newly diagnosed with cancer or participating in a support group [4].

Raising awareness and educating the public. Cancer advocates may work at a local or national level to increase awareness and educate the public about cancer and the importance of screening and early detection, for example. This can involve speaking with religious and civic groups about critical issues affecting people living with cancer, such as insurance access, job discrimination, and disparities in care. Raising awareness can also include communicating with the local and national media to draw attention to cancer-related issues.

Raising money for cancer research. Advocates may plan or participate in local and national fundraising activities that support cancer research. Examples include donating money to a cancer group directly or through a workplace giving program, volunteering for a cancer walk fundraising event, and buying products?€”ranging from clothing to postage stamps?€”from companies or organizations that set aside a portion of the money to support the cause.

Supporting cancer research through clinical trials. Promoting clinical trials [5] is another way to support cancer research. For example, patient advocate organizations can help increase the number of people enrolled in clinical trials by listing clinical trial search engines on their websites. Individual patient advocates can join a clinical trials cooperative group sponsored by the National Cancer Institute, review research grants, assist in the development of clinical trial protocols and informed consent forms, participate in community outreach and education regarding clinical research, help reduce barriers to participation in clinical research, and recruit patients to specific clinical trials.

Changing public policy. Cancer advocates may choose to work to support or change laws affecting people with cancer [6]. This can involve sending a letter to a legislator, testifying at governmental hearings, or speaking publicly about a cancer-related policy issue [7].

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and other cancer groups are working with Congress and federal agencies to improve the lives of people with cancer by addressing legislative and regulatory issues that affect cancer care and research. Learn more about ASCO's cancer policy and health care priorities [7].

More Information

Advocacy and Policy [8]

Patient Advocacy and ASCO [9]

Clinical Trials [5]

Additional resources

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS): What Is Advocacy? [10]

Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups: About Advocacy [11]

Cancer Leadership Council [12]

Research Advocacy Network [13]

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Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/research-and-advocacy/patient-advocates/being-cancer-advocate
[2] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/Being_A_Cancer_Advocate.mp3
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24672

[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25383
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24863
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24862
[7] http://ascoaction.asco.org/
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/23
[9] http://www.cancer.net/node/24848
[10] http://www.canceradvocacy.org/take-action/
[11] http://www.cancertrialshelp.org/patient_content/pdMainContent.aspx?intAppMode=0
[12] http://www.cancerleadership.org/
[13] http://www.researchadvocacy.org/