

VOICES OF CANCER by Lynda Wolters

EXCERPT

Tip 1: A good way to get involved is to find out when a patient is going to an appointment or having treatment and then be there for them. I do that with my cancer friends, and they are always genuinely happy to see me, even if I am only there to share a hug. It is surprising how a five-minute visit can carry a patient through an otherwise long, lonely day.

Tip 2: Setting up a meal delivery chain through mutual friends is a great way to be present and available to the patient and their family.

Tip 3: Checking to make sure the patient has adequate transportation to and from appointments is very useful because, most times, we patients either do not feel up to driving or are unable to drive after receiving treatment.

Tip 4: It is also helpful to have someone clean the house, even if that only means the bathroom and the kitchen. My husband did his best to do it all: work, cook, take care of me, clean. But, oh, what I would have given for a hand in this area, as I felt a lot of guilt by not being able to keep up my own house for a year.

Tip 5: Leading on from the previous tip, another way to provide support is to keep the patient's caregiver in mind. That person has the weight of the world on their shoulders with all the added responsibilities. And don't think the patient doesn't realize this, which in turn adds unhealthy stress to the situation. The sense of guilt that comes with this can at times be overwhelming to the patient. Consider taking the caregiver out for a much-needed cup of coffee or meal, or perhaps sit with the patient so the caregiver can go for a solo walk or on an outing with friends. If the caregiver is running on empty, everyone feels it, so being present and available to the caregiver is a huge help to the patient. Whatever you do, we do love you for trying: anything is better than nothing. It is on the patient to educate friends and family as much as it is on the non-patient to be sensitive to the irritating little sayings that seem so harmless. Bottom line: most patients would prefer a well-meaning gesture, such as a meal or a visit, to an empty cliché that is better left on a T-shirt or a charity wristband.