

# I'VE SURVIVED CANCER... NOW WHAT?

## HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR PRIMARY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER



### COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PRIMARY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER:

- Besides your relationship with your oncologist and medical team, it is important to maintain a relationship with your primary healthcare provider.
- If you have a new primary healthcare provider, update him/her on all of your cancer diagnoses, treatments, medications, and your health history.
- Discuss any pain or symptoms that you have been having.
- Take a list of any medications that you have previously taken or are currently taking, including vitamins, herbs, over-the-counter drugs, or any other supplements.
- Discuss any emotional, mental as well as physical issue.
- Keep your primary healthcare provider up-to-date with your current family medical history.

### SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE:

- What symptoms should I tell you about?
- What kind of doctors should I see now that I'm done with treatment?
- How often should I come see you?
- What routine tests or screening procedures do I need (colon, mammogram, pelvic exams)?
- Can anything be done to help the pain, fatigue and other problems I'm having?
- What can I do to keep the cancer from coming back?
- Will having cancer affect my health insurance?
- Are there any cancer support organizations I can contact?
- How can I maintain a healthy weight and eating habits?

### GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS:

- Bring paper to take notes.
- Ask someone to come with you to help understand and remember what was said.
- Make a list of questions in advance and bring them with you.
- Ask the most important questions first, in case your appointment runs out of time.
- Describe problems briefly and say how they make you feel.
- Ask the provider to explain what he/she says in terms that you can understand.
- Ask the provider about the best way to take medications and about possible side effects.
- Ask for a time when you can call the provider to get answers to your questions or for an additional appointment.
- Get a copy of your records to keep about any follow-up care you receive.

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SCHEDULE FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS?**

Typically, follow-up appointments vary on an individual basis due to the specific type of cancer, treatment, or other crucial factors. Follow-up appointments are commonly scheduled every 3-4 months during the first 2-3 years after treatment.

### **WHAT OTHER SERVICES CAN BE USEFUL DURING FOLLOW-UP CARE?**

When involved in follow-up care, it can be helpful to become involved in other services such as support groups, couples' counseling, genetic counseling, fertility and sexual counseling, home services, dietary and nutrition services, physical therapy, pain management, stress management and occupational therapy. If you have questions about these services, ask your primary healthcare provider, nurse navigator or social worker.

### **QUICK FACTS:**

- There are over 13 million cancer survivors in the U.S., and this population continues to grow.
- Survivors are living longer and many, including the elderly, have chronic medical conditions, which also require care.
- Primary healthcare providers can play an important role in caring for cancer survivors as they cope with living their "new normal."

### **RESOURCES:**

#### **National**

- National Library of Medicine: [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov), 1-866-346-3656
- National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship: [www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org), 1-877-NCCS-YES
- National Cancer Institute- Life after Cancer Treatment: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/life-after/treatment/page3>, 1-800-4-CANCER
- National Comprehensive Cancer Network: [http://www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life\\_after\\_cancer/default.aspx](http://www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life_after_cancer/default.aspx)

#### **Local**

- New Mexico Cancer Council: [www.nmcancercouncil.org](http://www.nmcancercouncil.org)
- New Mexico Department of Health Cancer Prevention and Control Program: [www.cancernm.org](http://www.cancernm.org), 505-841-5860
- Albuquerque Cancer Coalition: [www.accnmcca.org](http://www.accnmcca.org), 505-272-7813
- What Medical Records Should You Keep to Improve Your Care Beyond Cancer?  
<http://nmcancercouncil.org/pdf/medical-records-factsheet.pdf>