



## Information is **GOOD MEDICINE**

*By Cary McCartin*

Two and a half years ago I was diagnosed with cancer; Hodgkin's lymphoma - "the good cancer" is what everyone told me. I wasn't necessarily that thrilled. As a twenty-year-old college student, moving back home to Baltimore was a bit of a shock. Not only did I have to break in the old bedroom again, but I had to miss out on the parties, the friends, the ladies, the football games, and of course the school books.

After six months of treatment, my enmeshed relationship with my oncologist came to a halt and I was set free into the world again. I graduated from college and after a brief stint as a middle school lacrosse coach, went straight to the non-profit cancer world of Cancer Care Connection, my current employer. While I primarily handle development in our organization, which was started to help connect people to resources and information on cancer, my office does lie well within earshot of our three Cancer Resource Coaches. I hear questions like, "When were you diagnosed?", "What medication was given to your mother?", or "Is this the first reoccurrence?".

When I think back on my experience with cancer, I realize I was just like a rich man with a chauffeur. I just went through the motions. The only reason I could get away with this was because I had a mother who literally did everything for me. She managed my prescriptions, insurance, meals, rides, hair, questions, and concerns. I went through cancer, but don't know anything about it. As a result, I figured it is time to ask an expert. So I sat down with one of Cancer Care Connection's Cancer Resource Coaches, Lee Horzempa, a Master's level social worker specializing in oncology with over five years at CCC. I wanted to find out a little more information about how the "normal" cancer patient deals with the diagnosis.

**Q: Before I get started, I want to ask you as a Cancer Resource Coach, can you describe what Cancer Resource Coaches do at Cancer Care Connection?**

**A:** The vision of Cancer Care Connection is that no one facing cancer feels alone; that all individuals receive the compassionate and professional support they need to make the best decision for their situation. We also hope to influence community, business, health care and government leaders to continue to improve the quality and accessibility of resources to those affected by cancer. We pursue our work in a way that forwards this vision through all our actions, and we work towards the best possible outcome for every individual we touch.

**Q: What are some of the main concerns people seem to have when they call you?**

**A:** Financial and insurance issues are definitely main concerns for a lot of callers. Other things people call about are practical concerns- anything from transportation,

help at home, getting a wig, to second opinions, support groups, and peer support - what we like to refer to as coping assistance.

**Q: When someone is diagnosed with cancer, they enter a foreign land and often feel quite lost. After taking so many calls and talking with so many people affected by cancer, what advice can you give people who call that makes them feel a little more comfortable?**

**A:** I want them to know that they are not alone. Many other people are dealing with the same issues and there is support and help available.

**Q: Are there any options out there for people who want to talk to someone who has already dealt with the same cancer they are dealing with?**

**A:** There is peer support through organizations that deal with specific cancers such as breast, leukemia/lymphoma, lung, and more. The Cancer Hope Network can be used for any type of cancer. They attempt to connect the caller to someone about one year out of treatment who had the exact same type of cancer. The key to all of these organizations is that people can communicate by phone or email to their peers. For some people, this may be easier than having to go out to a support group.

**Q: The Internet is overwhelming when it comes to searching for available resources. How do you sift through the valid ones and make sure people know about them?**

**A:** We follow guidelines to ensure that websites meet the stan-

dards followed by academic librarians and other professionals. Navigating the web alone after hearing a diagnosis is daunting. We strongly believe you need a guide to coach you through where to go, how to interpret what you are reading and process the resulting emotions that arise. One of our strengths is that we not only provide information and referrals, we coach people on how to get their needs met and listen empathically as they share their sometimes tragic circumstances.

It's always reassuring to talk to one of Cancer Care Connection's Cancer Resource Coaches. For the loved ones of cancer patients who are extremely confused and lost, there is help. For the cancer patients with no family in the area, and no care giving team living with them, there is help. We CAN take action in the face of cancer. We can figure out the questions to ask, the steps to take, the resources available to us. Sometimes help is just a phone call away. For more information on Cancer Care Connection, please call 866-266-7008 or visit our website at [www.cancercareconnection.org](http://www.cancercareconnection.org).

*Cary McCartin, the Development Coordinator for Cancer Care Connection earned his Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Delaware. After facing Hodgkin's disease in 2003, McCartin has shifted his focus from politics to the non-profit sector. Although young, McCartin has extensive experience in grassroots marketing, online advertising sales, and web solution sales. A self-proclaimed extrovert, McCartin has volunteered his time as a speaker on survivorship for the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults, and recently received a Governor's Citation in Maryland for his work. McCartin's current aim is to increase awareness on the ever-growing issue of cancer in the workplace. Contact Cary@phillyfitmagazine.com*