

Thought Leadership for Oncology Providers

The Changing World OF CANCER PATIENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

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It comes as no surprise to anyone, that the Covid Pandemic has changed just about everything that we thought was normal. The opportunity, not the challenge, is to navigate the change to ensure that quality support programs exist for our patients as they and their care givers face a diagnosis of cancer.

Isolation has become the norm. No longer are patients and their loved ones encouraged or even allowed during lengthy procedures. That same isolation can be managed by offering options to start and/or continue supportive options to enhance the cancer journey.

Cancer program administrators have the opportunity to initiate or continue active and exciting support programs by piggy backing on the way that other disciplines have redesigned their efforts to accomplish their goals.

A robust patient support program that existed pre-pandemic can continue and if your facility didn't have support programs, now is the time to become the super star. Support programs consist of Support Groups and Complementary Options.

Let's talk first about Support Groups.

These groups can be general or specific to a particular cancer diagnosis like Coping with Cancer (general) or Breast Cancer (specific). These types of groups historically would meet face to face. They can now be incorporated into digital or electronic meetings using

a Zoom-like platform, as an example. Patients can be queried for their amount of interest as they are receiving treatment, or all patients can be invited to an electronic meeting at an assigned date and time.

Identifying the Needs. To do this let's use a specific program like an Acrylic Paint Pour Class as an example:

1. A Group Leader to run the meeting and encourage interaction and dialog with the meeting members.

- The leader should determine the number of weeks the class will run
- The Leader should determine the curriculum of each call. (What projects will be introduced and the class will be doing during the class. My beginner class is four weeks and does a dirty pour flip cup, a line pour and ring pour and a string pull. My advanced class is four weeks and does a flower pour, a chain pull, a wave and a jewelry option. We used a different group of four colors for each of the Beginner and the Advanced Classes.)
 - The leader may be the one that does the clerical/back room work of group.
 - Gathering the email addresses,
 - Sending the invitation for the meeting(s),
 - Setting up the Zoom meeting event,
 - OR these tasks may fall to valued cancer program team employee.

Remember that the current isolation environment is stressful on the healthiest person but those that are facing the uncertainty of a cancer journey are very vulnerable and need many options to make this journey the best it can be.

2. Gathering the material needed for the class

- Determine the number of canvases that will be used
- Determine the acrylic paint colors (We use 4 colors)
- Mix the acrylic paint and the paint medium (This saves time and medium so as not to waste either paint or medium)
- Paper cups for paint pouring, sticks, toothpicks, string or yarn for string pull project and/or glitter.
- Basic format of the acrylic paint pour technique, the amount of paint needed for differing sizes of canvases (in ounces) and supplies needed for pours when students continue to “pour” after the classes are completed.
- The materials for the class are assembled in a kit that the students pick up at the cancer center after they call the main desk to let staff know when they will pick up their kits. We do not mail or deliver kits to save on costs as well as to garner commitment to the class.

3. First day of Class, the Leader connects to the call source, in our case Zoom, to assure that the connections are good.

- Video cameras either via Phones on tripods and/or Computers.
- Audio connection and levels need to be tested.
- Electrical source to assure that there is no interruption or disconnect during class.
- Take attendance as the students log into the class.
- Describe the set up and the materials needed. Show the set up while talking and also show an example of what the project will look like.
- Start the class, making sure that if there are questions the students are encouraged to ask.
- Encourage discussion among the students so that they connect and express concerns. (The class can more easily bond and talk about issues that they are going through their journey with cancer.)
- End of the class, remind the students of the next class, how to contact for questions.



Another issue for electronic classes is funding and identification of the Leader.

- Funding can be accomplished with grants (both local and regionals), group funding (we have a local motorcycle group that donates money for patient programs every year), profits from the gift shop sales or line item budget from operations, if available.
- Identification of Leaders can be done by word of mouth, local academic organizations, Facebook requests for local experts/teachers. Some may request payment, while others may volunteer their time and expertise.

Other classes/programs that we offer for our patients that have moved from in person to Zoom meetings are:

- Living with Cancer Support Group
- Beginning Yoga
- Chair Yoga
- Drum Circle
- Art & Creative Healing
- Dimensional Diamond Painting (Beads)
- The Heart of Grief
- Mindfulness Class
- Lymphatic Drain Massage for Self Care
- Cooking – A Healthy Eating Class
- Weight Loss Opportunity for Cancer Survivors

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