Ovarian Cancer Australia Webinar

Living with hope and uncertainty.
The emotional impact of diagnosis and treatment for ovarian cancer.

Dr Carrie Lethborg BSW, MSW, PhD
St Vincent’s Hospital, Melbourne
Ovarian Cancer Australia
Webinar Presenters

Dr Carrie Lethborg has been a social worker and researcher in the setting of cancer for over 25 years. Her PhD study into the role of meaning in adjustment to Advanced Cancer has been developed into a meaning-based therapy for the palliative setting trialed at St Vincent’s Hospital, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and Cabrini Prahran. She is a clinical leader in Social Work at St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne, researcher in Social Justice in Health Research for St Vincent’s Health Australia, a specialist counselor for the Breast Cancer Network Australia’s Secondary Breast Cancer service, honorary research fellow in Psycho-oncology at Monash Medical Centre, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the University of Melbourne.

Diane Gardiner was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2015 and is a Churchill Fellow. Diane worked in the museum and heritage sectors over the past 30 years. In 2013 she was awarded the Museums Australia Victoria Award for Excellence. Diane started her museum career at the National Trust of Australia Victoria. In 2010 she created the new museum at Old Treasury Building in Melbourne and was appointed the General Manager. Diane has held a number of executive roles in museum organisations, currently she is President C J La Trobe Society, Secretary Women’s Heritage Centre Victoria and retired as Chair History Council of Victoria in 2016.
A life transition is initiated when a person’s current reality is disrupted (Selder, 1989).

The process of transition involves bridging the gap between the old reality and the newly constructed reality.
## Diagnosis

‘Well Person’ to ‘Cancer Patient’

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<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Adjustment task</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>Managing shock.</td>
<td>Appraising the threat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bewilderment</td>
<td>Making treatment related decisions.</td>
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“...one of those moments that will live on in life. It’s scary. I hope I never have to have that moment again when she tells me it’s cancer.”

She described the scene like a photographic still with, “the crying, the feeling of tears, mum was at the end of the bed and she burst out crying and ran.”
## Treatment - ‘Cancer Patient’

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“It was just awful. It was as bad or worse than I ever expected it to be... each time you have a dose of chemotherapy, it takes longer for your body to get better, ... I just really couldn’t see it ending.”

“.... during treatment you're in go forward mode, well I didn't stop to think about what was really happening to me ...”
### Treatment Completion

‘Cancer Patient’ to ‘Cancer Survivor (?)’

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<th>Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relief mixed with ambivalence &amp; fear.</td>
<td>Adapting to changes in values, attitudes and expectations.</td>
<td>Looking back &amp; appraising from a distance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning to process the experience &amp; plan for the future.</td>
<td>Constructing a new reality.</td>
<td>Looking forward &amp; developing new goals.</td>
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“Whereas at the time of going through treatment, the time of being operated on and having all of that, it was a time when I didn't really think that I ever really had cancer... looking back I think it was a bit unreal, whereas now it's becoming real” (Annie).
Living through the experience of diagnosis and treatment for cancer has many similarities to living through any traumatic experience.

While a person is in the middle of a traumatic experience they are seldom able to focus on the experience itself. Rather, they use of diversion and avoidance are common coping mechanisms for managing trauma.

A major aspect of the survivorship experience following trauma relates to the residual impact of the experience that was avoided.
Fear of recurrence is a common and natural feeling.

Having survived cancer makes some patients hyper vigilant in looking for any physical sign that the cancer has returned.

They find themselves second-guessing any new feeling and worrying about every symptom.

This is normal behaviour and should diminish with time.
Impact

MY LIFE
Emotional distress

- A normal person under extraordinary circumstance
- Acknowledging emotional distress can be very difficult and for some carries with it a sense of personal failure.
- It's important to remember that finding out that you need emotional help and support does not mean you are weak or that you have something wrong with you psychologically.
- All it means is that you are a human being in crisis—and sometimes it takes a great deal of strength to admit this and do something about it.

Photo credits: Tú, mi dulce locura. ¿Sabes cual es mi problema? que no se cual...locuras-sin-fin.tumblr.com
Impact on family

- You *and* your family should be recognised as the ‘unit of care’.
- Patients themselves often report family needs and issues as their biggest concern.
- Family physical and emotional distress increases as cancer advances.
What can help?
Keeping perspective

You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.
Manage moments

“It is not hard to live through a day if you can live through a moment. What creates despair is the imagination, which pretends there is a future and insists on predicting millions of moments, thousands of days, and so drains you that you cannot live the moment at hand.”

André Dubus
Make cognitive behavioural links

What you think

What you do

How you feel
You are called in for a repeat blood test by the hospital. They tell you it’s nothing to worry about.

You think, “This is it, I knew it was worse than I’ve been told, the treatment isn’t working”.

Your heart begins to race, you feel tension around your temples, you start to get a headache, your shoulders feel tense and sore.

You cancel coffee with your friend and call someone to pick up the kids from school and go to bed.
You enjoy a coffee with your friend and then pick up the kids from school.

You are called in for a repeat blood test by the hospital. They tell you it’s nothing to worry about.

You think, “I am so grateful that the hospital is so thorough and double checks my test results. I’m glad there is nothing to worry about.”

Happy that you got some good news.
You are called in for a repeat blood test by the hospital. They tell you it’s nothing to worry about.

Your heart begins to race, you feel tension around your temples, you start to get a headache, your shoulders feel tense and sore.

You think, this is it, I knew it was worse than I’ve been told, the treatment isn’t working.

**TAKING CHARGE**

- **Stop**
- **Calm yourself down**
- **When did you start to feel anxious?**
- **What is the validity of the thoughts you had?**
- **You could:**
  - call back and ask for more information explaining that the call left you worried
  - do some relaxation
  - go for a walk
  - do something distracting
  - talk to your friend about it over coffee
Impact on your relationship with your world and what is meaningful to you
meaning serves to buffer against the anxieties that accompany existence

(May and Yalom, 2005)
Not about the big questions...
The pursuit of little meanings.
A fascination with nature.
Doing what you love.
The wonder of play.
Kindness
Simple beauty in the world.
What are you bringing to this experience?

- Take a close look at yourself in your current circumstances.
  - What are you doing to take care of yourself?
  - Are you getting the best medical care?
  - Are you seeking and finding support, encouragement and love from those around you?
  - Whatever pain and discomfort you are feeling, do you have a sense that there is still meaning and purpose in your life?
  - And is there something more, from among the many possibilities open to you, that might enhance and enrich your life now?
Courage does not always roar, sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow”

(Mary anne Radmacher)
Ovarian Cancer Australia Connect

Ovarian Cancer Australia has now launched a place where you can connect with other women with an ovarian cancer diagnosis to seek support, advice and information.

Go to our website (www.ovariancancer.net.au) and follow the links to view the forum and join the community
Ovarian Cancer Australia

www.ovariancancer.net.au

OCA Support and Information Line

1300660334