

# CANCER PATIENT QUICK START GUIDE

Thank you for requesting a copy of this Cancer Patient Quick Start Guide. My name is Jim Foster and I have put together this guide to help other cancer patients as they begin their cancer journey. This Cancer Patient Quick Start Guide is based on my two different personal experiences as a Hodgkin lymphoma cancer patient (learn more by visiting the About page at [www.cancerinterviews.com](http://www.cancerinterviews.com) for details). It is my hope that every cancer patient may have the tools and resources as quickly as possible, to begin their personal cancer journey and perhaps be able to avoid some of the mistakes and learning curve that I encountered, when dealing with the possibility of a cancer diagnosis.

This guide is dedicated to the countless number of people who assisted me during my two cancer experiences, from my loving wife, my parents, to the dozens of doctors, paramedics, medical staff, counselors, friends, family, clergy and even strangers who I had never met before. This guide is not intended to be a guide throughout the entire cancer journey, but rather a quick initial guide to getting set up and started in the right direction. It is my sincere hope that you will have a successful cancer outcome and I wish you comfort, strength and peace throughout your journey!

*Thank you - Jim Foster, two-time cancer patient and very grateful survivor*

## **Top 10 Suggestions for Getting Started On the Right Course with Your Journey:**

### **OBTAIN AN ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS**

It may seem simple, but often times, symptoms don't initially point clearly to their underlying cause. Quite often, it can be very difficult for doctors to accurately diagnose patients for a multitude of reasons. It is impossible to properly treat an illness without first knowing exactly what you are dealing with. It's your body and your life and you owe it to yourself to make sure and obtain an accurate diagnosis. This may entail getting a second opinion and possibly even a third, fourth or more, depending on how rare your illness is.

Most doctors will not be offended if you elect to obtain a second opinion and many doctors will encourage you to do so and even cooperate by making your medical records and test results available to them, with your permission. In most cases, doctors truly do want what is best for you and will cooperate in helping you obtain an accurate diagnosis and determining the best possible treatment options available for you.

### **EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS**

Hearing the words "you have cancer" is one of the most serious and impacting phrases you may ever hear in your entire lifetime. Everyone who has heard those words reacts differently. Express your emotions however you need to. Those emotions may contain one or more of the following feelings including anger, fear, sadness, self-pity, depression, disgust, surprise, eagerness, overwhelm, embarrassment, frustration, insecurity, lonely, hopeless, misery, resentful, sad, tense, terrified, trapped, worried, worthless and a range of other possible emotions.

Take some time to express your emotions and vent in a non-harmful way. Seek out professional assistance with your emotions from licensed professional therapists. Please know that experiencing emotions is a natural part of the process and one of the first steps on a successful cancer journey.

## **TELL AT LEAST ONE PERSON**

Don't hold it inside. Tell at least one person about your cancer diagnosis and preferably more than one person who you trust and know cares about you. Being able to share this heavy load with someone you care about, will immediately allow you to have a sense of knowing that you are not in this alone. Depending on how many people you know, you should also consider telling more than just one person, if possible.

Consider sharing your situation with your family, loved ones, friends and spiritual advisors or clergy person if you have one. You may be surprised to find out how many people really care about you, if you just give them a chance! The more people that know about your situation increases the number of people available to help with day to day tasks, with fundraising efforts to assist you and your loved ones and people to give you and your loved ones moral support.

## **SELECT A DOCTOR, TREATMENT PLAN AND TREATMENT FACILITY**

This is a very important step and one that should involve a good deal of research, interviews with doctors and staff, checking references, reading reviews, as well as tours of potential treatment facilities. Determining which doctors and treatment facilities are covered by your health insurance or payment plan is a crucial factor as well. As mentioned above, now is the time to obtain second opinions and discuss different doctors' treatment recommendations and visit the treatment centers where you will potentially be receiving your treatments.

Having confidence in your doctors, confidence in your treatment plan and confidence in your treatment facility and staff is paramount to a successful cancer journey. Imagine being on a sports team and going into a game or match and thinking you were on a losing team. It would probably be hard to win, wouldn't it? So do your homework, so that you can be confident in your team, make your decision and proceed with confidence.

## **FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S ADVICE AND NOT THE ADVICE OF THIRD PARTIES**

Once you have selected a doctor or team of doctors, commit to following your doctor's advice regarding treatment, exercise, diet, etc. and remember, results can take time, so don't give up. Keep fighting and following the plan. Keep in mind that you did your research, got your second opinions and made a sound decision. Stay confident.

Unfortunately, there will be others around you, who will try and raise doubt about everything from your doctors, to your treatment facilities, to the medical staff, to the overall treatment plan. They may have the best intentions for you, but they probably weren't there with you in all of the meetings with potential doctors or tours of potential treatment facilities. They probably don't know all of the intricacies of your health insurance situation and they probably aren't medical doctors themselves.

And most importantly, they aren't the one who is dealing with a cancer diagnosis. Trust in yourself that you made a well thought out and informed decision and politely tell them that you appreciate their concern, but that this is your body and you have made your decision and you would appreciate them supporting you in a positive way from this point forward and keeping their opinions to themselves.

Know that throughout your journey, there will be ups and downs. Days when you feel great and days when you don't. As difficult as it may seem, try to remain positive and live

with an attitude of gratitude. Be thankful for what you do have and not discouraged about what you don't have. Stay on course and proceed with confidence.

### **LOCATE AT LEAST ONE CAREGIVER**

A caregiver is someone, usually a family member or close friend who can oversee and take care of many, if not most of the tasks that need to happen for a you during your cancer journey and do so in a way that allows the you to focus on what you need to, in order to get better and not burden you with all of the details.

These details may include everything from cooking, cleaning, laundry, dealing with insurance companies, paying the bills, transportation to and from medical facilities, home maintenance duties and much, much more. A caregiver is more than just a hired helper, a caregiver is someone who really cares, deep down, about your well-being. It is very hard, tiring and seemingly endless work that somebody has to do and caregivers are very special people. Not everyone has what it takes to be a caregiver.

Hopefully, you are lucky enough to have someone in your life that can fill the role of your primary caregiver. There are tools available to you which we'll discuss later that can allow your caregiver to share the work load with others who may be able to lend a helping hand here and there to cook a meal or drive you to an appointment or volunteer to help you in some way. Your focus should be on getting rest, getting treatments, taking care of your body and ultimately getting better. You owe it to yourself and your recovery to let these people help you during this time.

### **LOCATE A FINANCIAL ASSISTANT - INSURANCE COUNSELOR**

This step most likely needs to take place very early on in this process and probably should have been mentioned first on this list of suggestions. Unfortunately, in the United States and many countries, health insurance and the coverage it provides, are not uniform. This means that you are responsible for navigating the health insurance industry maze to find out if you are covered for cancer treatments, how much you are covered for, how much you will have to pay out of your own pocket, what the limitations of your coverage are and which doctors and treatment facilities accept your type of insurance.

If you don't have adequate insurance, you will have to find out what doctors and treatment facilities are available to you and what type of payment arrangements are available as well as any other type of financial assistance programs that may be available to you.

Regardless of the type of insurance or lack of insurance you have, you will be receiving letters, bills, invoices and more from your doctors, treatment centers, care providers and insurance company or governmental entities. It is a steady stream of paperwork. Having someone to assist you with this extremely important paperwork is invaluable. It is in your best interest to find someone to delegate this responsibility to from the very beginning of your journey. Someone that is very detail oriented and very good with numbers and balancing a checkbook and can accurately perform your banking responsibilities for you.

This personal financial assistant individual may or may not be your primary personal caregiver, but it must be someone you trust completely, because they are going to be dealing with financial matters that could impact you, your healthcare and your credit for years to come. Most doctor's offices, treatment centers, hospitals and medical support service organizations have some type of in house financial counselors or social workers who can assist you or your personal financial assistant to a limited degree.

## **ESTABLISH A METHOD TO COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE**

In many cases, being diagnosed with cancer will initiate a steady stream of inquiries from concerned individuals who will call or electronically message you asking you everything from, when did you find out, how did you find out, how are you doing, do you have a doctor yet, what kind of treatments are you going to be receiving, what can they do to help, do you need a meal, what exactly did your doctor say, and the list of questions goes on and on and on.

Even if you don't have to take all the phone calls or respond to all of the electronic messages, your caregiver or family could be stuck on the phone for hours every day communicating with everyone. Your caregiver and your family will need their rest too.

In addition, some people will want to come and see you. Not knowing any better, they may just drop in on you at various times throughout the day, evening and weekends. All with good intentions of course and some may stay longer than you would like them too and it may be difficult to ask them to leave, so you can get some rest or just have your personal time.

There are some great online resources available to take this load off your shoulders and off the shoulders of your family and caregiver and still allow everyone who is concerned about you to keep up to date on your situation, your treatments, your progress, your needs, your visitation hours, your appointment schedule and a way to be able to send you messages to a centralized, private social media platform.

The free online service that I recommend the most is: Lotsa Helping Hands ([LotsaHelpingHands.org](http://LotsaHelpingHands.org)) which is a free service that allows you to update everyone at the same time with information that you would like to share and it also has a volunteer caregiver interactive calendar where you or your caregiver can post your schedule and request for people to volunteer for tasks such as driving you to a doctor appointment on Tuesday at 2pm for a duration of 3 hours, or a request for a meal for your family of 4 on Saturday evening at 6pm, or help with housecleaning and laundry on Monday afternoon. People can click on those items on the calendar and then they will no longer show on the calendar.

You can set visitation hours for everyone to see and respect, such as Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6-8 and Saturday from 1-4 and please limit your visit to a maximum of 15 minutes, or whatever schedule, limitations or special instructions you desire. This type of free service will reduce stress for you and your caregivers and reduce hours upon hours on the phone every day, while still keeping everyone in your network fully informed.

## **REMEMBER THAT CANCER IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION**

Take one day at a time and don't worry about anything else. If you're having a really tough day, just focus on one minute at a time. That's all that really matters. Just do your best and try to enjoy the moment and today. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Being a cancer survivor is a daily accomplishment not an end result. Just remember that every day that you survive from cancer, you are a cancer survivor.

## **LEARN FROM OTHERS WHO ARE, OR HAVE WALKED THIS PATH BEFORE**

Learn from others who are dealing with similar situations or have walked your path before. Join a support group in person or online and reach out to others for support. You can

check out interviews with other cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, doctors, medical professionals and more at [CancerInterviews.com](http://CancerInterviews.com) and the Cancer Interviews podcast or the Cancer Interviews YouTube channel, where we are sharing the cancer journey through interviews.

#### OTHER ONLINE PATIENT AND CAREGIVER RESOURCES

(CancerInterviews.com is not endorsed by any of these organizations)

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov) National Cancer Institute at the National Institute of Health (United States of America)

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) American Cancer Society – Charitable organization with resources for cancer patients, caregivers and families.

[www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) Charitable organization with resources for cancer patients, caregivers and families.

[www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org) Charitable organization with resources for cancer patients, caregivers and families.

**DISCLAIMER:** The information contained in this Cancer Patient Quick Start Guide is based on the sole, non-professional opinion of Jim Foster, based on his personal experience as a two-time former cancer patient and survivor. This information is deemed to be reliable and accurate, however, all readers are encouraged to independently verify the information contained herein and rely solely on their own research and investigations. We make no warranties, either expressed or implied as to the accuracy of information contained in this document and is not engaged in providing medical, legal, tax, or financial advice or any other professional advice requiring a license. Readers of this document are advised to seek all medical, legal, tax, financial and other professional advice from respective licensed providers.