

# Talking about Cancer in the Workplace

**Larita Howard, PHR**  
Manager, Human Resources  
Arizona Division

**Laurie Mann, LCSW**  
Social Worker, Cancer Center  
at Dignity Health St. Joseph's Hospital  
and Medical Center



September 10, 2020

# WEBINAR HOUSEKEEPING

## WELCOME

*All lines have been muted.*

*Please type any questions into the chat or Questions panel and we will do our best to answer them all at the end.*

*All handouts and a copy of the presentation slides are available in the Handouts panel.*

*Please complete the survey that will be emailed out after the presentation*

*A recording will be added to the library of HAWP webinars on our website within 48 hours.*

*Special thanks to our supporting partner Dignity Health for their generous support in making this webinar possible.*



# An HR Perspective

# Key On-Hand Information/Checklist

- Review Company Policies, Procedures and Benefits
  - Be prepared by doing your homework:
    - Medical and Rx Plan coverage
    - Cancer/health navigator or advocacy resources
    - Leave of Absence (LOA)?
    - Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
    - Workplace accommodations, including flexible scheduling
    - Well-being programs, specifically resources that support holistic health
    - Consider community-based resources (local cancer chapters or hospital-based resources)



# Give Employees The Resources They Need

HR Practitioners can provide information about:

– Flexible work schedules:

- An employee with cancer will need time to go doctor's appointments and receive treatment. This is a perfect opportunity to discuss options such as work schedule, ability to work remote, as well as intermittent leave

– Taking a leave of absence:

- Employees might be eligible for various types of leaves; best to review all available options

# Give Employees The Resources They Need (Con't)

HR Practitioners can provide information about:

## – Health and welfare insurance coverages:

- Cancer treatment can be expensive, and employees might have questions regarding plan coverage (including out-of-pocket expenses) for their cancer treatment. Be prepared to share medical plan documents and summaries for them to review. Also, connect them with your health plan and/or care management provider to find a physician who specializes in treating their type of cancer.

# Give Employees The Resources They Need (Con't)

HR Practitioners can provide information about:

- How to communicate what's happening to peers and direct leader
  - Employees may ask for help talking with their co-workers or supervisor. It is important for employees to know that they aren't required to share the details of their diagnosis or treatment.

# Complying With Employment Law

Be aware of legal requirements that apply to employees with cancer:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on their physical abilities.
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA): Employees can take FMLA if they have a serious health condition and are unable to perform the essential functions of their job.



# During and After Treatment Needs

During treatment, the needs of the employee might change. Be prepared for:

- Flexibility of work schedule
- Modifications to leave type or work responsibilities

# During and After Treatment Needs (Con't)

*Remember, an employee's need for cancer care doesn't end with active treatment.*

- Follow up appointments are essential for sustained health.
- Regular treatments to prevent or treat recurrence.
- Side effects are possible:
  - Some survivors have long-term or late physical effects due to treatment. Encourage employees to speak with their physician for ways to manage any side effects (i.e., fatigue, memory loss or difficulty concentrating, numbness or tingling due to nerve damage, heart or lung problems).
- Continued flexibility:
  - Employees recovering may need schedule flexibility for follow-up appointments, and to ease back into their normal work schedule.

“ I’ve learned that  
people will forget what  
you said, people will  
forget what you did, but  
people will never forget  
how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

# Social and Emotional Support...



# Thank you for attending!

- Thank you for your presence today! It affirms your commitment to your employees' well-being.
- Research shows individuals with strong support cope better through a cancer experience.
- In 2019, nearly 16.9 million diagnosed with cancer are surviving their illness (*American Cancer Society, 2020*).
- About 53% of those 16.9 million are under the age of 70 (*American Cancer Society, 2020*).

## A few tips for the human resource and managerial professionals:

- You are both an employer representative *and an* employee advocate: *you* have the power to set the tone for workplace support.
- Think before you speak or before you act (“Golden Rule Approach”).

# Topics for our discussion...

- **Common Employee Concerns:**  
Some Surprises... Some Reminders
- **Your Responses (Employer):**  
What Helps... What Doesn't?
- **Resources:**  
What's Out There?



# Common Employee Concerns:

- Will my position or job security be impacted if I tell my employer about my cancer diagnosis? Am I required to tell? How much do I tell?
- Will I lose my health care benefits?
- If I inform my employer, is everyone else that I work with going to find out, too?
- Will my manager or co-workers perceive me, or treat me, differently if they know?
- I need “normal” right now; if I inform my employer, will my “normal” disappear?
- How will I manage financially if I miss work because of my medical care and, therefore, my pay becomes less?

# Common Employee Concerns (continued):

- What if I need a change in access to work facilities (restroom location; increased air circulation) or need frequent breaks?
- How am I going to ask for, and manage, time off-work for my medical care or if I don't feel well?
- I don't want people to see me "looking like this."
- How do I respond to others' comments or questions while at work, about my health?
- If I do ask my employer for help, will I be seen as less capable in my job?; or as a financial burden to the company?; or as a scheduling "problem?"
- I feel torn between taking care of myself and being a "good" employee.



# What Helps?



- **Respect Confidentiality... Cultivate Trust**
- **Listen Well**
- Ask about Employee's Preferences: informing co-workers; receiving new information from the employer
- If Meeting In-Person: *intentionally* choose place: private, no interruptions, not rushed, embody calm
- Be Comfortable with Silences
- Consider Sending Occasional Card or Note: "Hi, From The Office Bunch!" with brief, encouraging words
- Be Willing To Repeat Yourself/Offer Information in Print: Emails w/bullet points; Fact Sheets; Laminated Cards
- Consider offering simple *Workplace Kindness*

# Supportive Things You Can Say



- “I don’t know exactly what to say, but I hope you know we’re here to help you.”
- “I’m sorry you’re going through this.”
- “If you want to talk about it, I’m available.”
- “You’re missed here, with the rest of your team.”
- “This must be a difficult time for you.”
- “I’m not sure of the answer to that, but I’ll find out and get back to you.”
- “Please help us understand how we can best help you.”
- “What are your suggestions for making things more manageable for you?”
- “It’s important that you’re comfortable with any arrangements we make.”
- “Let’s check in regularly to see how you’re doing.”
- “You’re a valuable member of this team. We’ll work together to figure out how to make this work.”

# What Doesn't Help:

- Interrupting
- Giving advice
- Trying to cheer them up
- Speculative comments
- Saying, “I understand”
- Comments about appearance
- Sharing *your* stories
- Asking specific questions about diagnosis and treatment



# Resources

- *Oncology Social Worker*
- *Employer-Based Patient Navigator*
- Maricopa Crisis Line, 602.222.9444
- Cancer Care, Inc., 800.813.4673, [cancercares.org](http://cancercares.org)
- Triage Cancer, [trriagecancer.org](http://trriagecancer.org)
- Cancer Support Community, 602.712.1006, [cscaaz.org](http://cscaaz.org)
- Allsup, 866.606.8812, [allsup.com](http://allsup.com)
- Lotsa Helping Hands, [lotsahelpinghands.com](http://lotsahelpinghands.com)
- 211 Arizona
- American Cancer Society, 800.227.2345, [cancer.org](http://cancer.org)
- National Cancer Institute, 800.4.CANCER, [cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)
- Cancer and Careers, 646.929.8032, [cancerandcareers.org](http://cancerandcareers.org)

# Thank You!

For more information about cancer prevention, treatment, screening, or to request a speaker for your worksite on any cancer-related topic, **call:**  
**602.699.3366**



**Cancer Center at Dignity Health St. Joseph's Hospital**  
*We are Proud to be Here for You and Your Family!*



**Q&A**

**PLEASE ENTER YOUR  
QUESTIONS IN THE CHAT.**

*HEALTHYAZWORKSITES.ORG*





# CONNECT WITH US



@Got\_HAWP



Healthy Arizona Worksites Program



[healthyazworksites.org](http://healthyazworksites.org)



[info@healthyazworksites.org](mailto:info@healthyazworksites.org)



**THANK YOU  
FOR WATCHING!**

*HEALTHYAZWORKSITES.ORG*