Cancer Health™

Palliative Care With a Bottle of Cannabis

I walked out of my appointment with a glimmer of hope.

May 21, 2019 By Megan-Claire Chase

This is the farthest down the rabbit hole of utter despair I have ever experienced. I've always been prone to depression. I'm an empath; a truly sensitive and creative soul. I've battled many tough situations from being bullied in high school and a bit in college to dealing with racism and an abusive relationship to personal tragedy. Those situations pale in comparison to life post-cancer.

I often hear:

"Don't let cancer define you"

"You can get your life back"

"I want this to be over for you."

I bristle when I hear this, especially from a fellow cancer survivor/warrior. My cancer experience has not been easy. Yes, I've been able to experience some awesome opportunities during active and post cancer that I wouldn't have had otherwise. My cancer path continues to be difficult and painful on many levels.

I was never informed by my active treatment oncologist of all the possible long-term side effects that could happen after chemo, multiple surgeries and radiation. Each time I would bring up a side effect I would be told, "That rarely happens." I didn't feel heard.

Since October of last year, I've battled the following in this order up until today:

Weight began creeping back up

Fibromyalgia diagnosis

Osteoarthritis in knees

Started down the rabbit hole of depression

Pinched nerve in my back = prednisone = weight gain

More nausea = more Zofran

Dermatitis of my eyelids = more prednisone

Received a permanent handicap sign due to severe neuropathy in my feet

Took myself off Ativan after two years

Insomnia

Horrible side effects from Exemestane

Shingles on my left arm thru my hand = excruciating pain

Being told there are NO other medication options to help prevent a recurrence

Higher dosage of Neurontin which turned out to be too much

Swelling of ankles

Weight gain AGAIN

Severe nausea, pounding headache and dizziness

ER trip due to severe dehydration which raised my BP to a dangerous level

Vertigo

Sigh. Seeing this list in writing literally took my breath away. I completely spiraled into utter depression and grief because through all of this I have been working full-time. There has been no time for rest or recovery or even a real vacation. Every penny and any PTO go toward doctor appointments, medication and procedures.

It was my amazing rheumatoid specialist Dr. Tiliakos who heard my cry for help in a portal message a few weeks ago. He asked if I knew about the Palliative Care program at Emory. I freaked out hearing that term ‘palliative.’ I’m not dying yet! He said it’s not like that at all. It’s another high-level support to take care of patients physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally.

Oh my God; I have been heard.

My appointment was scheduled for May 14th, but after the ER trip last week, I called in a panic asking to be notified of any cancellations. Lo and behold, I got a call on Wednesday morning asking if I could come in at 2pm. For the first time ever, I dropped everything and just said, YES.

Emory University Hospital is huge. I valeted when I got there. Well, I didn't know there were multiple valet stations and I was in the wrong building. I started panicking and was crying when I called the office number. The woman who handles all the scheduling actually called me on her cell and went searching for me. She found me and personally walked me all the way to the correct building.

I was floored by her kindness. That was only the beginning.

When the doctor walked into the room, I got very anxious. She immediately put me at ease. This was unlike any appointment with a physician because she typed MY words into her notes. As a writer, I don't mind someone typing while actively listening. She said, "We treat the whole person, so your words are important and valued to help develop a treatment plan." Can you guess what happened next? I burst into tears of relief.

She could visibly see the physical and emotional toll battling the chronic pain and all that cancer has taken from me the past three years. Not only did she recommend the marijuana card and cannabis drops but acknowledged that my body is super susceptible to side effects and knows I'm scared of gaining even more weight from the possible munchies. I don't want that "high." I just want to be relaxed enough to able to sleep and help deal with the pain.

Next up was meeting the social worker/therapist. She is younger than me but very intelligent with the specialized training I've been needing. We were setting up another time to meet for a full session when I said it depends on the cost. When she said, "There is no cost. Once you're in palliative care, every session is FREE. You can come as many times during the week that you need. It's whatever you want to do." Once again, my tears of utter relief were flowing so hard that I almost couldn't stop.

For once on this cancer path, I was given a CHOICE. That's why I've been so angry, depressed, anxious and filled with grief because so many choices were made for me. When your medical team says you must have these surgeries and treatments because you will die if you don't does not bring comfort. It only evoked fear.

I walked out of my appointment with a glimmer of hope. I felt slightly lighter than when I walked into it. To top it off, the scheduler stayed until my appointment was over to personally walk me all the way back to the valet because she didn't want me to get lost. She didn't have to do that. She even took time to show me landmarks, so I park or valet in the correct place next time.

The winds of resilience keep pushing me forward…and I'm grateful.

Until next time,

Warrior Megsie

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