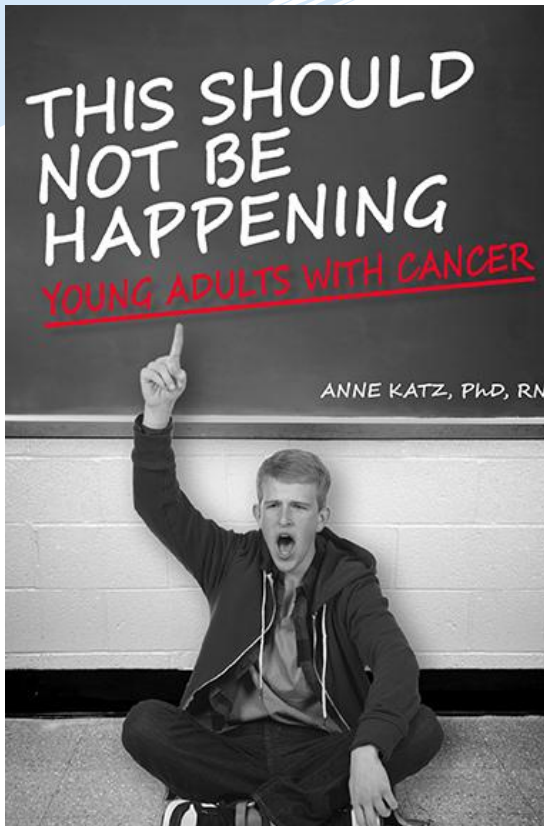


AYA NEWSLETTER

ADOLESCENT & YOUNG ADULT (AYA) PROGRAM • AUGUST 2020



Dating During and After Cancer: Opportunity or Overwhelming

By: Anne Katz, PhD, RN, FAAN

As a certified sexuality counselor working with young (and older) adults who have been diagnosed with or treated for cancer, I am often asked for advice about how to start dating during or after treatment. Single individuals are often terrified about entering the dating scene with the after effects of treatment - weight loss or gain, scars, missing parts, loss of sexual organs, etc. I do my best to support them find the answers to their questions but in reality, there is no perfect solution and many single people who have not had cancer have the same fears and concerns!

Web-based dating sites or apps are a common way for singles to meet new people. They allow for a certain degree of safety and anonymity and can be very helpful when one has a history of cancer. It allows the survivor to screen prospective dates by disclosing their cancer history outright. But early disclosure may also limit meeting people who may

prospective dates by disclosing their cancer history outright. But early disclosure may also limit meeting people who may not consider someone with a cancer history, until they meet someone and there is a connection irrespective of the cancer. There is a website site, CancerMatch.com that advertises itself as a way for survivors to connect without awkwardness because only people who have had cancer are allowed to join so there is no need for disclosure, etc. Another website, Romance Only, targets those they call "Sex-C" (people who have had cancer) who want companionship and love without the expectation of sexual intercourse.

I wrote extensively about this in a chapter of my book "This Should Not Be Happening: Young Adults with Cancer: (Hygeia Media, 2014). I interviewed dozens of young adults and asked them what they did about this because they are the experts, having lived the experience. Opinions varied widely with some people describing how scary it is/was to disclose to those who told prospective dates within the first few minutes of meeting to 'weed out' anyone who was going to be scared off. Others were more wary and waited until the second or third date to disclose. There were as many opinions as people interviewed and ultimately, survivors will have to face rejection and hurt emotions, just as those without a cancer history have to. Getting back into dating after cancer involves redefining one's self in the context of a changed body and often a new perspective on what is important in life. Accepting and adapting to the physical and emotional changes and getting to know the 'new' person one has become is part of the process. The reality is that everyone brings baggage or past experiences into a new relationship and there is no one who has led a perfect life with no challenges.

Katz, A. (2020). Dating During and After Cancer: Opportunity or Overwhelming. *Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology*. Retrieved from https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cano-acio.ca/resource/resmgr/newsletters/Newsletter_Winter2020.pdf

AYA PROGRAM UPDATES

AUGUST 27: VIRTUAL AYA MEET-UP

Our Virtual AYA Meet-up will be scheduled on August 27th from 6:00 p.m - 7:30 p.m. The meet-up will be hosted on the Ontario Telehealth Network (OTN) so all personal health information is safe and protected. We will have a limit of 15 participants so if you are interested, please let us know ASAP by e-mailing us at aya@uhn.ca and we will send you the invite link.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

The Adolescent and Young Adult Program is looking for patients and/or family members who are interested in helping us to improve our services so that we can better meet your needs. We are looking for a group of individuals with diverse life experiences as well as diverse experiences with their cancer journey so we can get

many perspectives on how to improve our services. Your level of involvement can be entirely up to you, whether it will be reviewing patient education material once or twice a year or involvement in our patient and family advisory committee. If you are interested, please email aya@uhn.ca for more information.

AYA PROGRAM AT PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE (@AYAPROGRAM)

We will be sharing AYA Awareness posts on our social media platforms. Be sure to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and share with your own network to help increase awareness for this often-overlooked group of young people.

If you're an AYA survivor and want to help others find hope and inspiration through your personal experiences, we want to hear from you! Send your story to aya@uhn.ca and encourage others to get the help and support they need.