“My Friend Has Cancer”

From watching the battle, to being a part of it ~ By: Natasha Puri, AYA Volunteer

“My friend had cancer” - so many of us have said this, and we’ve all heard it. The “C-word”. While the word itself may be small, the gravity of it’s meaning is indescribable. It’s the field of medicine in which many unanswered questions lie; there’s no cure. We think of the movies, the books, the inspirations. We rarely, however, think of the implications of the disease itself and its impact physically, mentally, and socially, on those it unfortunately affects. This could be attributable to the fact that we are unaware. And thus, being aware is of the utmost importance so that people can use their unique healing powers of support, compassion, and altruism, that go beyond the workings of any drug.

My friend was diagnosed with cancer, and when she told me “doctors found a tumor,” I didn’t even realize it was cancer. She didn’t have the words to say it, and perhaps my wishful thinking didn’t give her the opportunity to. After understanding her diagnosis, however, I tried to be the best friend I could be: check in frequently, make her little gifts, be available whenever she needed someone to talk to. I always wanted to do more, but I wasn’t sure how. I wanted to respect her privacy, but be an outlet for her. I wanted to be involved, but not impose. I wanted to be supportive, but not sympathetic. I watched as she went through chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, followed her blog and social media accounts, and witnessed how she blossomed into an inspiration. She inspired me to inspire her, to push her, to be there for her. I just never knew what the right answer was, and if there wasn’t a right one, was there a wrong one?

One day my friend messaged me and told me she can’t have children if she doesn’t have surgery. Being as clueless as I was, I thought oh no, the cancer spread to the ovaries. She quickly reassured me it wasn’t that, but rather her risk of infertility from the drugs she was receiving during cancer treatment. She found it hard to understand that having children completely of her own may not be a possibility. “It’s not the end of the world,” she said, and I felt helpless. Sadly my friend passed away and left a legacy of a true fighter.

This summer I’ve had the opportunity to work with the AYA Program at Princess Margaret. I quickly understood the need for this program, and its importance in contributing to the care of young adults. Cancer patients not only have to battle treatment, and the psychological effects that can result from this disease, but also the lack of support around fertility, body image, diet, physical ability, sexual health, social relationships, work, school, finance, and many more. I feel as though I took my friend's attitude and spirit for granted and neglected to realize the other issues she had to deal with. Being part of this program gave me a better understanding of what young adults have to go through when they live with cancer. I feel proud to be an integral component of our patients’ care, whether it’s giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions or providing them with resources that can help.

I wish I was more informed during my friend’s journey, so I could have better understood what she went through. She was a fighter, and there wasn’t a time when she didn’t smile through the pain. She spoke every word with hope and happiness, battling this disease not for herself, but also for everyone around her. This summer has made me realize that I also played a part in her fight. I encourage cancer patients to seek help when needed, and take advantage of resources. There are many people who are willing to be there for you, but they are also unsure of how to help. Dependence on people in our life can change, as not everyone can cope with this news, but reaching out to others may be a cathartic alternative. As someone who hasn’t had the disease, I am truly in awe of the strong-willed individuals I see coming into Princess Margaret every day. I applaud you all for your courage. While you’re on the frontline of this battle, know that we’re right behind supporting you.
Support AYA

Program Feedback: Click on the link below to provide us with feedback on our AYA program if you have met with our CNS Laura Mitchell; help us help you!

http://svy.mk/1EADyTC

AYA Resource Website:
We are in the process of revamping our AYA site and want your opinion on what you would like on it. If you have an interest in providing input, email us at: aya@uhn.ca

Upcoming Event Ideas:
We would like your input on upcoming future events that will allow you to meet other young adults at the hospital. Please take a minute of your time to fill out this short survey:

http://svy.mk/1DFvsxu

Patient Committee

If you are interested in joining the committee, email aya@uhn.ca for more information.

Young Adult Cancer Canada

Retreat Yourself: August 13th - 17th, 2015 - British Columbia

Retreat Yourself Adventure:
September 16th - 21st, 2015 - NFL

Email: connect@youngadultcancer.ca

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre