

# Cancer Creates...

STRENGTH • COURAGE • HOPE

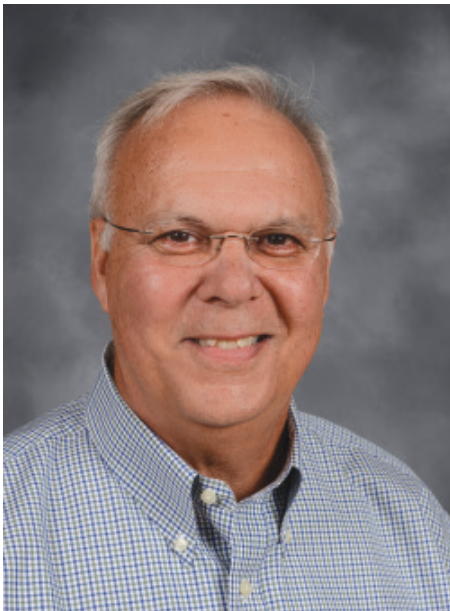


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## CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

### It Takes a Team

By Harry Ferguson



Eight hospital departments. Seven medical specialists. Six support services. More than five different healthcare professionals. Put them all together, and you get a good picture of the individuals and services I, as a caregiver, interfaced with at The Valley Hospital from 1999 through 2011.

My wife, Linda, was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the age of 54. Throughout her nearly 12-year journey, Linda endured four major operations, multiple years of chemo and 28 rounds of radiation. This journey took her through three major hospitals, with Valley being the most frequently traveled. For the first 10 years, my role as caregiver was primarily a support role: accompanying

my wife to numerous doctor visits and three-month CT scans, as well as being with her at the chemo lab as often as I could. I remember arranging a call from my meeting in London to the infusion lab as a sign of support (and frankly, as a comfort to me to hear her voice). Being a second set of ears was helpful as well.

Then in February 2009, my caregiver role switched from one of support to one of action. The disease had advanced, causing intestinal blockages. Linda required an emergency ileostomy and a nephrostomy, which required a hospital stay of almost 30 days. She also had two uterine stents that required changing on a regular basis. I was now changing the ileostomy bag and keeping the nephrostomy sterile and flowing. Fear of infection was always the enemy. I could not have performed these tasks without the professionals, the doctors, nurses and technicians at Valley. Their guidance, patience and caring got me and my family through these very difficult times.

During this 25-month period, Linda did not just live but made it a point to travel with the family, even taking a cruise to Canada. Of course, after each trip we ended up in the hospital.

At this point in my experience, I got to meet other caregivers. I attended a caregiver meeting organized by Pastoral Care. It was helpful to me in many ways and allowed me to see the anxiety, fear, frustration and even anger in some of the other participants. You could tell by

their questions that this was new and scary in many ways. I started to think that maybe I could help other caregivers in the future. After all, I was fortunate enough to be retired, but other caregivers have to deal with the stress of work, insurance or long-distance communication in addition to being a caregiver.

I've learned lots of valuable lessons from my experience as a caregiver. For example, one must be one's own advocate. Ask questions; people are willing to help. And remember that each patient is someone's loved one.

Nurses, business associates, service associates, transport and, of course, doctors all played a role in Linda's care and all were important to me as the primary caregiver. They helped treat the whole person, not just the disease. As our journey was coming to an end, one nurse came out of her role and asked if she could pray with the family. Various nurses from the floor came in to say goodbye. This was a team of special healthcare professionals who treated my wife and my family with dignity and empathy. They made my caring easier. At my most challenging moments as a caregiver, there was always a reassuring person to help me. And that is why I agreed to join Valley's Patient and Family Advisory Council, as patient/family issues are very important to me. I hope I may be able to contribute to help a family or individual as they care for their loved one.

### We're Here to Help

For more information about cancer support services for patients and caregivers, please call Valley's oncology social workers at **201-634-5787**.



COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CARE

## New Services at Valley-Mount Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Care

Exciting changes are underway at Valley-Mount Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Care! Over the last few months, we've enhanced our research program and strengthened our collaboration with the Mount Sinai Health System. We've also introduced several new technological innovations that are helping our patients fight cancer, including:

- **Stereotactic Radiosurgery (SRS)** is being used to treat small metastatic brain tumors, resulting in less damage to normal brain tissue, and better neurological function, than whole-brain radiotherapy. Valley's new Gamma Knife Icon™ is an SRS instrument that uses up to 192 precisely focused beams of radiation to control malignant and nonmalignant tumors, as well as vascular and functional disorders in the brain, without harming surrounding healthy tissue.
- **MRI/US fusion prostate biopsy** is now available at the Luckow Pavilion. MRI/US fusion allows biopsy of suspicious areas with unprecedented precision. In addition, Valley offers a Multidisciplinary Urologic Oncology Clinic to educate and help each patient choose the treatment that is right for him or her, be it surgery, radiation or active surveillance.
- **Seed localization**, used for patients with breast cancer, is a wireless technique to precisely mark areas of mammographic abnormalities. Our approach minimizes the extent of tissue that the surgeon must remove, contributing to a superior oncologic and cosmetic result. With our advanced recovery protocols for anesthesia, women with breast cancer can have their entire diagnostic evaluation and surgical, radiation and medical treatment at the Luckow Pavilion, all under one roof, completely avoiding hospitalization.

### For More Information

Talk to your doctor or nurse to learn more about these additions to our cancer services.

## We Want to Hear from You!

Have an inspiring story or helpful tip to share? Let us know, and it may appear in our next edition of *Cancer Creates!* Email submissions to [jforlen@valleyhealth.com](mailto:jforlen@valleyhealth.com).

# Cancer Survivorship Series

## *Thriving Through and Beyond Cancer*

The Cancer Survivorship Series is an ongoing series that educates, informs and empowers patients to better manage their health and enhance their quality of life during and after cancer treatment.

### Maintaining a Healthy Weight Post-Treatment

*Thursday, September 28, 6–7:30 p.m.*



Often, cancer survivors struggle with maintaining a healthy weight following treatment due to treatment- or disease-induced side effects that can cause weight loss and gain. Registered Dietitian **Leigh Slagle** and Jean Gilcini, of the Live Well Cancer Survivor Program and a personal trainer at the Wyckoff Family YMCA, will share insight, offer recommendations and discuss ways in which survivors can get back on track through proper nutrition and exercise.

### We're Talking About It!

*Tuesday, October 3, 5:30–7:30 p.m.*



Join Valley and CancerCare for a two-hour workshop for parents or caregivers with cancer, their partners, and their children ages 5 and up. The workshop, led by licensed social workers from CancerCare and Valley, will help families learn to cope and communicate with each other more effectively. We will include a discussion of your children's needs for accurate information and emotional support as your family copes with cancer and its treatment. Pizza and fun activities for the kids will be provided.

### Healing Through Humor

*Tuesday, November 28, 6–7:30 p.m.*

Shera Dubitsky, MEd, MA, Director of Navigation and Support Services at Sharsheret, will join us to talk about how laughter can help reduce pain, decrease stress-related hormones, and impact the healing process. Shera will discuss some of the findings of laugh therapy research, share anecdotes, and offer resources and strategies that can help manage the cancer journey through laughter.

All workshops will be held in the second floor conference room at the Blumenthal Cancer Center in the Luckow Pavilion, 1 Valley Health Plaza, Paramus. Space is limited; to register, please contact **Brooke Laster, LCSW**, at 201-634-5787 or [blaster@valleyhealth.com](mailto:blaster@valleyhealth.com).

### There's More Online

Visit [ValleyHealthCancerCenter.com](http://ValleyHealthCancerCenter.com) to:

- Learn more about Valley's cancer services
- View upcoming events, classes and support groups
- Find more issues of *Cancer Creates*

