# From People With Cancer, Coronavirus Lessons for Everyone

People experiencing stress and fear from COVID-19 can learn a lot from the wisdom gained through battling cancer, writes one columnist.

March 30, 2020 By Benjamin Ryan

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Just as people diagnosed with cancer are thrust into a new, uncertain world and confronted with hard choices about engaging in treatment, the world at large is undergoing a parallel experience in which people are navigating the new reality imposed upon them by the coronavirus pandemic.

So writes veteran health columnist and author André Picard in an opinion piece for The Globe and Mail in Canada. He argues that the general public can learn a lot from the kind of wisdom people glean from battling cancer.

Following a cancer diagnosis, people often experience powerful emotions, including stress and fear, as they focus intently on their own mortality, Picard writes. They worry about their ability to maintain their work life and support themselves and their families. They face difficult decisions about treatment, weighing the potential harms, such as extreme side effects, against the potential benefits.

Similarly, the coronavirus pandemic has people around the world worrying about their well-being as well as that of those they care about. Many have lost jobs practically overnight. Others have been compelled to adjust to new ways of engaging in their jobs from home while worrying that an economic downturn may ultimately impinge upon their ability to make a living.

Just as many cancer patients endure toxic cancer therapies that cause short-term damage to the body for the benefit of longer-term gain in surviving cancer or extending one's life span, a wide swath of global societies have accepted the economic damage of shutting down businesses and limiting people's ability to move freely for the promise of reducing sickness and death and maintaining the functionality of their health care systems.

"We need to think of these acts as cancer treatments: some short-term pain that, we hope, confers long-term survival benefits," Picard writes. He goes on to hope that the kind of personal transformation that many people with cancer experience also comes to people confronting coronavirus around the world.

“A surprisingly large number of cancer survivors come out the other end of the experience seeing it as beneficial. Not something they would wish anyone but revelatory. They emerge from the months of anxiety, suffering and uncertainty feeling a greater sense of purpose and a newfound appreciation for life. They do not sweat the little things. They appreciate family time a lot more. They step away from the hamster wheel of work, or slow down. They bask in the second chance. Imagine if, collectively, we embraced this global pandemic as an opportunity for that sort of transformation.”

To read the Globe and Mail article, click here.

To read how Cancer Health blogger Adam Hayden handles the extra stress that coronavirus adds to people with cancer, read “To Handle Distress: Do As Much You As Possible.”

To get the latest updates on coronavirus and cancer, click here.

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