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Making the Best Decisions Together • March 27, 2015

Sharing Wisdom

How Caregivers Can Help Loved Ones Manage the Patient Journey

By June K.

As the caregiver and wife of a patient who has a blood cancer called multiple myeloma, I felt the need to learn as much as possible about the disease after my husband received his diagnosis. I knew I would be the primary caregiver at home, so I wanted to fully understand the available treatment options and what I could do to support him through the challenging times to come. In my situation, this added knowledge certainly helped me feel more confident in my caregiving abilities.

In our partnership as a caregiver and patient, my husband and I decided early on that we wanted to make treatment decisions together. The decision for my husband to move forward with a stem cell transplant was a difficult one, but we felt like we made the best decision at the time with the information we had. As we move down the road and continue to make other decisions, we have learned to conduct our own research and in conjunction with recommendations from his doctors, we come up with a plan of action that works best for us. Since my husband is the one going through the treatments, my job as a caregiver in this process is to encourage him and help in any way I can.

In addition to providing encouragement, I have found that simply being present as much as possible is important. I always go to doctor appointments and have accompanied my husband through his various cancer treatments. By being at

the doctor's office in person, I have the opportunity to ask the doctors and nurses any questions, ranging from potential side effects to watch out for to food suggestions for patients who are undergoing or recovering from treatments.

My general caregiving philosophy comes from something my mother always said, which is to "Make hay while the sun shines." On good days, I suggest to fellow caregivers that you get out of the house, have fun and do something that you personally enjoy. Good days also allow for you to spend quality time with your loved one, and you may find pleasure in developing a new interest or hobby that you can do together. Encourage your loved one to keep up with old friends when he or she is feeling well. Make every day count, make sure your loved one knows he or she is loved and also let them know you appreciate them going through so much to be here for and with you.

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