Providing Comfort & Support to Cancer Patients

The impact of cancer is felt throughout families, friends, and communities. Receiving a cancer diagnosis can feel very isolating, but no one should feel they need to experience cancer alone. When we hear that someone we know has been diagnosed with cancer, we often want to help but do not know how. As a family member, friend, or community member, you can offer courage and support to ease the stresses of coping with cancer.

Things you can do when someone you know has cancer:

- Create a safe, comfortable, and supportive space to allow the person to share their story. Focus on the person, not the disease.
- Share how you feel about their diagnosis (fear, anxiety, desire to help and support). Do not let your feelings become the priority of the conversation. Remember: you are there to support them.
- Do not feel the need to constantly speak to avoid silence. Just being present with a person provides support.
- Stay connected with the person (for example, by visiting them at home, phone calls, email or social media).
- Cook. Providing pre-made meals is a great way to support someone experiencing cancer, especially if they have children.
- Offer to accompany or drive the person to their medical appointments.
- Offer to run errands for the person (for example, grocery shopping or picking up children from school).
- Spend time with their children and/or grandchildren.
- Enjoy outdoor activities together.
- Watch movies together.
- Play cards or other games together.
- Share funny stories, jokes, or movies. Laughter is a healing medicine.
- Recognize when they may just need time alone to think, pray, sleep, or relax.

Any extra help you can provide will make a difference in the life of the person experiencing cancer. Quite often, trying to maintain a sense of normalcy for the individual who has received the diagnosis will help them feel supported.

(Source: Understanding Cancer, On-line Education Center, Alaska Community Health Aides Continuing Educations)