From the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Cancer Lifeline,

Silver Linings. A handful of unexpected but welcomed discoveries have powered us through this most challenging and disruptive year.

At the onset of the pandemic, like most organizations, Cancer Lifeline moved everything online and our staff quickly set up offices at their dining room tables. At the same time, we held our signature fundraiser, Breakfast with Friends, in the virtual world. Since we had no idea when we might go back into the office, our programming team held Zoom clinics to help our clients connect and facilitators optimize their online experience.

One of the first silver linings we experienced is that our online programs can reach even more people. Those who were already limited in their mobility or by their treatment were able to join our support groups and classes. With traffic and parking no longer barriers, attendance at some online programs doubled or even tripled.

Throughout this tumultuous year, our programming team has stayed in close contact with our hospital partners and social workers. Since we are a relatively small organization with 9 staff members, we can innovate quickly and nimbly. When we learned that the virus was taking its toll on the emotional wellbeing of healthcare workers, we worked with our facilitators to pilot a program for stress management and issues related to the pandemic.

Under the leadership of Susan Baumgaertel, MD, our annual Breakfast with Friends fundraiser moved from a 7:00 am sit-down Breakfast in downtown Seattle to a three-week online campaign. Exceeding our budgeted goal, this year’s Breakfast raised over $250,000. We coached our keynote speaker and clients to film themselves with their iPhones so that we could post their messages on our event webpage. All of our 21 board members stepped up to reach out to their networks to raise funds. Again, with barriers to in-person participation eliminated, we were pleased to see over 500 donors with more than 300 of them making their first ever donation to Cancer Lifeline.

Early in the pandemic, we learned that our partner Komen Puget Sound was unable to continue funding the Komen Patient Assistance Fund affecting nearly 500 low-income breast cancer patients.

As 2020 thankfully comes to an end, I would like to acknowledge the steadfast work of our board members under the leadership of President Ben Hicks and of our Advisory Board members, under the leadership of Chair Lynn Behar. These teams have actively supported our fundraising efforts, bringing new sponsors, friends, and donors into our circles, and helping us to surpass our goals. I want to personally thank all of our sponsors for sticking with us as we transitioned our fundraisers into digital formats. For a full list of our amazing 2020 sponsors, please see page 7.

I would like to also thank our extraordinary volunteers for sharing countless hours of their time, energy, talents and ideas.

Among these remarkable silver linings – more clients attending our programs, more board members joining our ranks, more donors participating in our online fundraisers, more connectivity with our hospital partners – there is one in particular that shines more brightly and that is you. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of people living with cancer.

In gratitude,

Joseph Yurgevich

Joseph Yurgevich, Executive Director
While the initial conversations with Virginia Mason Cancer Institute and Cancer Lifeline began several years ago, our programs at VMCC began in early 2019 with just a handful of support groups and programs. With patient/client feedback, Cancer Lifeline and Virginia Mason Cancer Institute worked closely together to grow and diversify the range of offerings.

“Before the pandemic, we had regular meetings with Cancer Lifeline staff and relied on bi-directional touchpoints and patient surveys for feedback. In addition to being a member of our Cancer Committee, Cancer Lifeline’s staff gave presentations directly to our docs,” said Virginia Mason Cancer Center Senior Director Maria Gonzalez.

Virginia Mason Cancer Institute Director Karen Hemeon added “Our social workers are even more connected in terms of an immediate feedback loop and are super plugged into driving the work to shift and respond to what our patients need.”

Nutrition classes focused on Healthy Eating & Cancer were just about to expand to include PCC with an interactive kitchen for cooking demonstration when COVID-19 hit.

“We were really looking forward to these interactive cooking classes that our patients wanted so much, when COVID-19 shattered our dreams,” said Gonzalez. “If there is any silver lining to the pandemic, it’s that by moving all of our programs online we’ve seen our patient attendance skyrocket. We can now reach patients and their families literally where they are. All the barriers for patients to be able to feel connected have been eliminated.”

“No other patient populations have been more quarantined and therefore more isolated than our oncology patients. The virus has dealt them a double whammy and puts them at even higher risk,” continued Gonzalez. “Cancer Lifeline has been a real lifeline for them and their families. They can now connect to others from the comfort of their own homes.”

“Cancer Lifeline is literally living up to its name as a lifeline in a new environment,” added Hemeon. “By being reachable through new platforms, its programs benefit the whole community.”

“Cancer Lifeline serves the Washington cancer community deliberately,” said Gonzalez. “Because it is a small agency, Cancer Lifeline is highly responsive and flexible. They bring a personal touch that is unique in this area. Added benefits include direct support by the Cancer Lifeline staff and their volunteers, offering touchbacks to Virginia Mason Cancer Institute patients in need including ongoing emotional support, program navigation and assistance getting connected to classes.”

“Cancer Lifeline client quote:

I see my cancer experience as a journey through strange, dangerous and unfamiliar territory. Cancer Lifeline provides me with a strong rope – a lifeline in the most needed places on this journey.

– Cancer Lifeline Client”
I'm a naturopathic physician specializing in integrative and supportive cancer care. I first learned about Cancer Lifeline when a colleague of mine was telling me how much fun she was having being a facilitator for the organization. I believed in Cancer Lifeline's mission and I wanted to be part of this family.

A lot of what I do with my patients daily, Cancer Lifeline can deliver on a larger scale. For example, advising on a diet that is supportive to bone marrow recovery, addressing side effects such as fatigue, neuropathy, cognitive changes, and stress management during cancer treatment. Cancer Lifeline takes it to another level by allowing more patients to have access to these resources through free educational classes and programs.

It is very important to take care of your own happiness during this challenging time. Some ideas that may help include finding a way to stay physically active, setting up small goals to look forward to, and building a new hobby. Pick a partner to hold you accountable to these activities and if you haven’t already done so, be sure to check out the free supportive programming at Cancer Lifeline.

The Oncology Social Work Network used to meet at Cancer Lifeline, so I’d guess it was 1985 or 1986 when I met first Barbara Frederick, our much-loved former executive director. I don’t remember when she asked me to get involved in Cancer Lifeline, but I do know that when Barbara asked, there was no way to say no. It was a pleasure to do any kind of work with her. I also enjoyed serving on the Board Member Recruitment Committee for several years.

The Patient Financial Assistance Fund had a humble beginning. The executive director at the time, Jan Gray, met with my husband, Howard, and I asking for an annual donation. She was surprised, and probably chagrined, that I had my own ideas about what Cancer Lifeline could do.

Throughout my career as an oncology social worker, I saw people who were struggling financially after they had worked hard and saved a little money that did not last through the expenses of a cancer diagnosis and treatment. Sometimes they missed work for a period of time, had extra expenses for childcare, supplies or medications, and they fell behind financially. I always wished for a fund to help them through the rough spots. When I left clinical practice, I managed a small private patient financial assistance fund, designated by oncology social workers to people who were struggling while in cancer treatment. I wanted Cancer Lifeline to have such a fund, available for clients and designated to people in need by oncology social workers.

Due to conflicting agency priorities, it took some time, but the fund did officially come into existence in 2008.

In 2005 Komen Puget Sound came to Cancer Lifeline with a grant for low-income Breast Cancer patients. They asked us to be the administrator and set up a system for vetting and dispersing the funds. This served as a model for how a Patient Financial Assistance fund for ALL cancer types could function.

A little more than 7 years ago the Cancer Lifeline Board and the Advisory Board made the commitment to raise money for this program, and I’m pleased to say we have continuously grown the fund to help more people in need each year.

The first fundraising event for the Patient Financial Assistance Fund was in 2015, an elegant event at The Ruins. We were thrilled to raise nearly $100,000. Compare that to this year’s on-line gala where we raised more than $500,000. The need, and the passion for fundraising, has increased exponentially throughout the years. We are excited to announce that in 2021 we are increasing the grant amount and expect to serve approximately 1000 people, a 32% increase from those served in 2020.

Even though I’ve been retired for a while, I seem busier than ever with many passions. Cancer Lifeline is at the top of the list. I’m thrilled to chair Cancer Lifeline’s Advisory Board. We meet three times a year, most recently on Zoom. Members range from former “Friends of Cancer Lifeline”, a group who worked with Barbara Frederick in the 80’s and 90’s, to former board members and other people who feel strongly about the work. Once we picked up the banner for the Patient Financial Assistance Fund, we have marched forward. We also are involved in fundraising and leadership through the Cancer Lifeline Breakfast, which supports all our programs, and many other programs and events throughout the years.
How long have you been with Cancer Lifeline? What is your title?

I am the Program Director here at Cancer Lifeline. I have been fortunate to have been with the organization for over 8 years.

What are the biggest challenges you see with the pandemic? What trends are you seeing?

For people living with cancer, facing the unknown truly encapsulates the day-to-day experience. Will I survive this? How will it impact my family? Will I return to the same person I was before cancer? The pandemic has only added to the unknowns – thrusting us into a space where even the day-to-day is unpredictable.

The effects of the pandemic for people living with cancer are furthered magnified. Concerns shared by our clients include: fear of going to a medical facility, possible delay in diagnosis or treatment, and inability to bring their loved one to infusion to help pass the time and provide moral support. It is a very difficult time to be living with a serious illness.

Although the pandemic has brought uncountable challenges, there have been benefits from having to “stay at home.” In March, Cancer Lifeline shifted all our support groups and classes online. This change has enabled people to access emotional support, cancer specific presentations and classes that promote health and wellbeing all from the safety of their home. Having access to critical support services has provided people with a much-needed safety net and a community of support that simply cannot exist in the medical setting right now.

How important is it to support emotional health when dealing with cancer in general and now in particular?

I cannot stress how important it is right now for people to get support for their emotional health. We are months into a major life shift for so many, and the reality is that our “new normal” will be what we make it. I wish for all that there is a concerted focus on self-care, self-compassion, and balance. One of the quotes I live by is from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “The only constant is change”. Truly! This helps me to remember that much of what happens is out of my control, but there are small things I can do to feel like I am in the driver’s seat.

Our offerings empower people to use the tools they have and new ones they learn to regain control and make choices centric to what is important to them. Hot topics focused on establishing control and addressing emotional health right now include:

- Managing information overload
- Mindfulness practices to reduce stress and anxiety
- Support Groups encouraging connection with others
- Coping with uncertainty
- Nutrition & Cancer: Foods to help boost immunity
- Exercise and Movement classes to fight fatigue
- Using creative expression to decompress and release

Most importantly, it is essential that people know they are not alone in their feelings. All of us have been impacted and deserve to know that there are ways to restore our emotional health and wellbeing.

What programming offerings are on the horizon for 2021?

Here are a few upcoming offerings I am particularly excited for:

- Changing Bodies: Coping with the Physical & Emotional Impacts of Cancer
- Writing Your Way through Grief & Loss
- PTSD & Cancer
- COVID-19 & Cancer: Managing Isolation
- Cancer & Financial Toxicity
- Combating Brain Fog with Nutrition
- Navigating the Emotional Impacts of Cancer
- Viviendo con Cancer (our NEW Spanish Speaking support group)
- Creative Outlets for Families with Children & Adolescents whose Parent Has Cancer

Cancer Lifeline client quote:

“I couldn’t believe all the programs here are free!”

– Anonymous
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:
Lynne Madrigal

I first learned about Cancer Lifeline through Volunteer Match. I felt that my training as a counselor, coupled with my experience as a hospice worker, would serve me well as a Cancer Lifeline volunteer. Of the four members of my immediate family, I am the only one not to have received a cancer diagnosis in my lifetime. I was therefore intimately aware of the toll cancer takes on both body and mind.

One doesn’t need a counseling background, however, to be a good fit for this work; empathy is at the heart of it all. I found the Lifeline training to be hugely instructive and inspiring as it teaches all the necessary skills you need to be successful.

To me, the most amazing thing about Cancer Lifeline is the culture of caring and mutual respect that prevails throughout the organization. I see this in the way that staff members interact with one another, with volunteers, clients, colleagues, and everyone in their orbit. I have felt embraced by CL from the moment I first walked through their door.

I am thrilled to be able to offer people something so special. The person who calls about financial assistance and then discovers that we offer an empathetic ear, support groups, nutritional guidance, expressive arts…a light goes on for them. It’s amazing! In addition to answering the phone, I also prepare the mailing of the monthly financial-assistance checks. It may sound silly, but the act of putting a check in an envelope and, later, dropping that envelope in the mailbox, makes our help feel all the more immediate and tangible. I love that.

Cancer Lifeline client quote:
I lost confidence in myself, but Cancer Lifeline gave it back to me.
– Anonymous

Cancer Lifeline client quote:
My cancer treatment is 150 miles from my home – this Patient Financial Assistance Fund helped pay for travel to and from, and for groceries.
– PFAF Recipient

Cancer Lifeline Facilitator quote:
This year the holidays look and feel quite different for us. We will be doing our best, despite our imposed limitations, to create an environment that allows us to celebrate and “connect” with the important people in our lives.
– Mary Ellen Shands, RN, MN, Cancer Lifeline Facilitator

Cancer Lifeline client quote:
…most amazing of all, we laugh a lot! I feel that I have better tools to make the most of each day and take part in my own healing.
– Support Group Attendee
TIPS FOR MANAGING INFORMATION OVERLOAD

by Meg Sweeney, LISCW

Today more than ever, we are pulled to watch the news and listen to the latest update on COVID-19. Of course, we want to know what is happening in our communities, and as folks with compromised immune systems, in active treatment, or taking care of a loved one, there is a strong need to know. However, repeated checking of updates and newscasts has a dramatic effect on our ability to cope with what is naturally overwhelming. Worldwide, experts suggest that we limit the amount of time exposed to the headlines, or we will stay in a heightened state of overwhelm.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Pick one or two reliable sources for your information regarding the pandemic.
2. Decide to check on the information updates at most twice a day.
3. Purposely read other information about nature, art, creative outlets you love, and science. It is important to know that the world is continuing despite the pandemic.
4. Take deliberate breaks so that you are moving or breathing. Simply walk in your neighborhood if you can. Stretching as allowed.
5. Stay connected with others in safe ways; online classes, phone calls and video chats with friends and family can really help.

Here are some proven strategies to handle information overload as a Cancer Survivor/Patient/Caregiver:

1. Set your intention. Before you begin on a deep dive of internet searches think purposefully of what you really want to know.

2. Allow yourself to ponder “What am I trying to find out?” Perhaps your medical team told you about a new study and you want to investigate it. “Okay, I’m researching for the purpose of finding out – and then I’m going to stop.”
3. Set your intention with your time. “How much time do I have, really? Okay anything more than one hour I know is too much. I’m going to set a timer.”
4. Stop at your intended time.
5. Affirm yourself for stopping and keeping that commitment, knowing you can research again at another time.

David M. Levy, author of Mindful Tech: How to Bring Balance to Our Digital Lives, says that we don’t need to do away with all our electronic devices. Levy endorses the strategies of intention and attention in deciding how to use tech devices. We are using them; we don’t need to allow technology to use us – this is an important distinction.

Learn more about ways to tactfully manage information overload that often comes with a cancer diagnosis at Meg’s online class on March 20 from 9:00 to 10:00 am via Zoom. Presented in conjunction with SCCA Proton Therapy Center. To register, visit cancerlifeline.org.

Worrying about money on top of being newly diagnosed with cancer was so overwhelming. The money went for my port surgery so I could start treatment. I feel incredibly blessed by the generosity of strangers during this incredibly difficult part of my life.

– Leann, recipient of a grant from Cancer Lifeline’s Patient Financial Assistance Fund
HATS OFF TO OUR 2020 SPONSORS!
Thanks for sticking with us as we moved our events online. We are grateful for your continued support.

Bruce and Jeannie Nordstrom

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“ I have been out of work for so long that I have exhausted most of my resources and the grant helped a lot. The first thing I did was to attempt to distribute the money evenly in between groceries, utilities, bills. The grant serves as a blessing, because it does more than support us, it helps us keep our head up and above water to keep battling cancer. I honestly wish the biggest success to everyone that uses their resources to support a cause like this. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.”

– Rafael, recipient of a grant from Cancer Lifeline’s Patient Financial Assistance Fund

Cancer Lifeline client quote:

“ I love Ami’s nutrition classes. I learn so much from her and have adopted a plant-based diet myself and feel the benefits.”

– Class Participant
Breakfast with Friends
WATCH ONLINE IN MARCH/APRIL 2021
Our signature fundraiser continues online this coming spring. Watch your in-box for news about the event featuring the faces of Cancer Lifeline – our keynote speaker, special videos with clients and facilitators, and stories about the people who make our community strong.

Resources for Hope
JOIN US IN OCTOBER 2021
The WiFi was positively buzzing with excitement on October 17, 2020 as Cancer Lifeline live-streamed our annual fall fundraiser from the lobby of the Escala building in downtown Seattle. Benefiting Cancer Lifeline’s Patient Financial Assistance Fund for cancer patients in need, this year’s Resources for Hope rolled out the red carpet virtually.

"You all stepped up in the midst of a pandemic to make sure that Cancer Lifeline could continue to support cancer patients in need and we raised over $500,000!," said Resources for Hope Chair Monica Adams. "Because of your generosity we are on track to distribute these critical safety-net funds to cancer patients. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!"

Watch for news about the date for Resources for Hope in 2021!

Client quote:

I couldn’t have survived this pandemic isolation, the bad air quality week, and the election as sanely as I have without the Cancer Lifeline exercise, nutrition classes and presentations. When I see my oncologist in December for follow up, I will be sure to sing praises of this essential organization for cancer patients so he makes sure to encourage his patients to look into Cancer Lifeline to enhance their treatment and recovery.

– Cancer Lifeline Client

Planned gifts can be a thoughtful way to reach your charitable goals, gain financial advantages and create an enduring legacy of hope for Cancer Lifeline.

Our mission may sound simple but to achieve it is not. We must rely upon valued supporters like you who continue to make an enormous difference in the lives of people who have been impacted by cancer.

Planned giving enables you to establish a lasting legacy for the people and the causes you care about. It costs you nothing during your lifetime and provides both financial and tax advantages.

Learn more by contacting Beth Brooks at bbrooks@cancerlifeline.org