
Work After a Cancer Diagnosis

During breast cancer awareness month, we recognize all people who have been touched by breast cancer—whether you are or have been a patient, a loved one, a family member, a friend, a caregiver, or even all these roles at different points in time.

A cancer awareness month is a time when we raise awareness to the importance of cancer prevention, screening, and early detection. It is also a good time to reflect and discuss other important issues related to cancer, such as side-effects management, survivorship, and relationships. In this column we consider employment challenges that may arise during and after treatment.

Talk to Your Healthcare Team

One of the common experiences during cancer is navigating work after a cancer diagnosis. Some people may be able to continue to work during cancer treatment. By contrast, some people may need to take a significant amount of time off from work or stop working altogether, which can cause a major strain on you, the patient, and your loved ones. Many people also face questions of how, when, or if at all to disclose their diagnosis to their employer.

If you are newly diagnosed with cancer, or are receiving active treatment, it is important to tell your healthcare team if you have concerns or questions about your job. The people who are on your healthcare team, such as navigators, can connect you with resources and professionals who can help you in dealing with issues related to your work and your employer.

If you have finished treatment, and have concerns related to your work, talk with your primary care doctor and ask about resources that are available to you, and reach out to organizations that can help.

Before Talking with Your Employer

It is likely that you will have to talk with your employer at some point about your cancer diagnosis, especially if you need to take time off from work or need extra time during or after treatment. Before starting the conversation with your employer, it is a good idea to consult one of the resources listed below to find out how to approach the topic, especially if you're concerned about how it may affect your job or are not sure what to say.

When you need to take time off from work, ask your human resources department what your rights are, whether your company provides you with disability insurance, and what is covered. This will alleviate some of the stress, especially during treatments that require some time off from work.

Reach Out for More Information

During this stressful experience, it is important for you to know that you are not alone. Resources are available that can help to navigate the specific difficulties related to work during cancer. Several cancer advocacy organizations (see **Workplace Resources**) have information about how to talk to your employer, how to request accommodations so you can continue to work, what your rights are as an employee, or when re-entering the workplace.

You can also get legal advice from legal organizations dealing specifically with cancer, such as the Cancer Legal Resource Center.

Workplace Resources

Cancer and Careers

<http://www.cancerandcareers.org>

Cancer Legal Resource Center

<http://www.cancerlegalresources.org>

866-843-2572

Triage Cancer

<http://tragecancer.org/>

424-258-4628

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-financial-and-legal-matters.html>

Patient Advocate Foundation

<http://www.patientadvocate.org>

Pratt-Chapman, M., & Harvey, A. (2017). Navigating Work After Your Cancer Diagnosis. Retrieved October 20, 2020, from <https://conquer-magazine.com/issues/2017/vol-3-no-5-october-2017/511-navigating-work-after-your-cancer-diagnosis>. Reviewed 10/20/2020.