



## **Maintaining Hope in the Cancer Experience**

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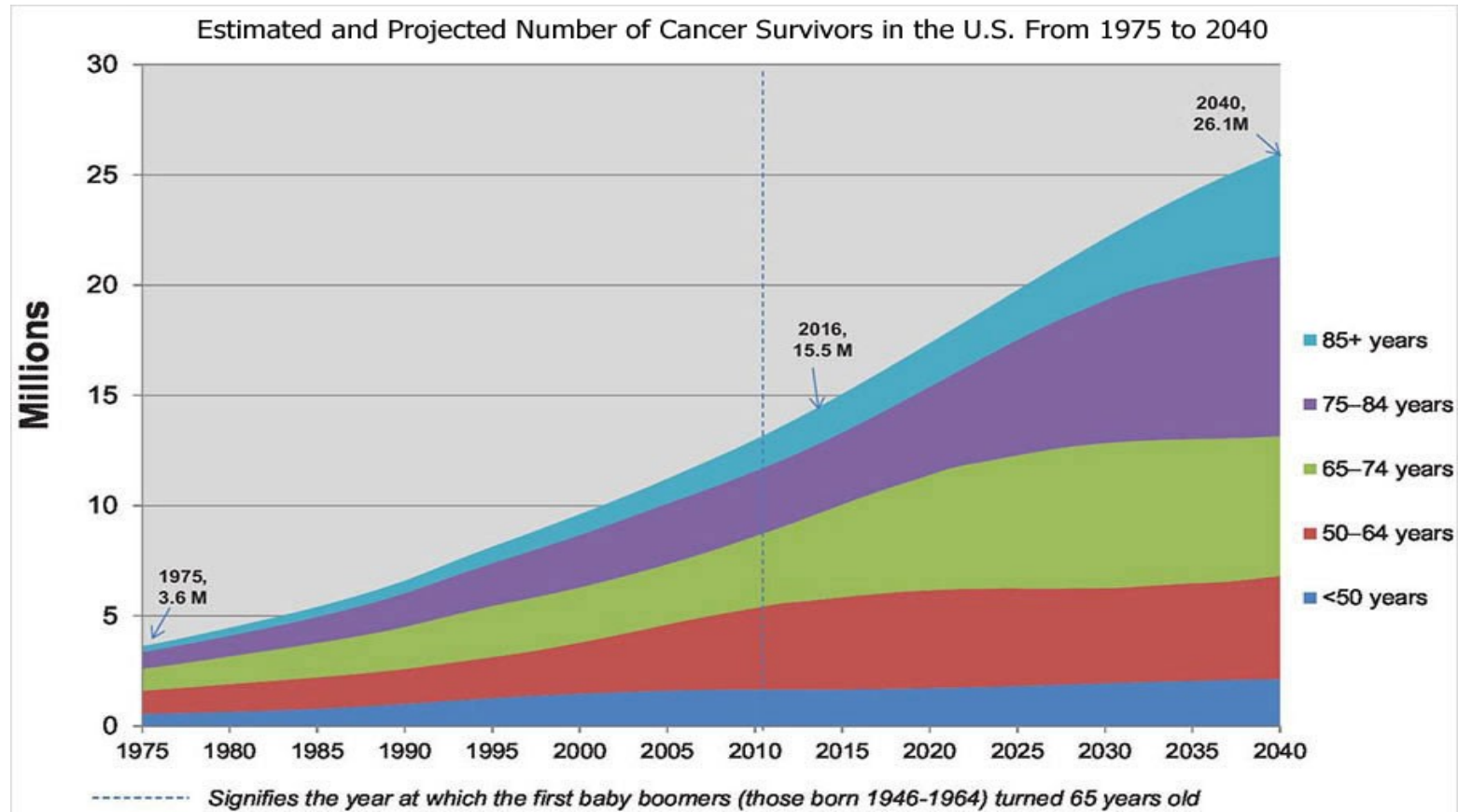
# The good news

- Cancer has been transformed as a disease once considered a “death sentence”, “whispered about”, and greatly feared
- To a disease that for many is curative, or at least may achieve long term remissions
- For others, it has become a “chronic illness”

# Still.....

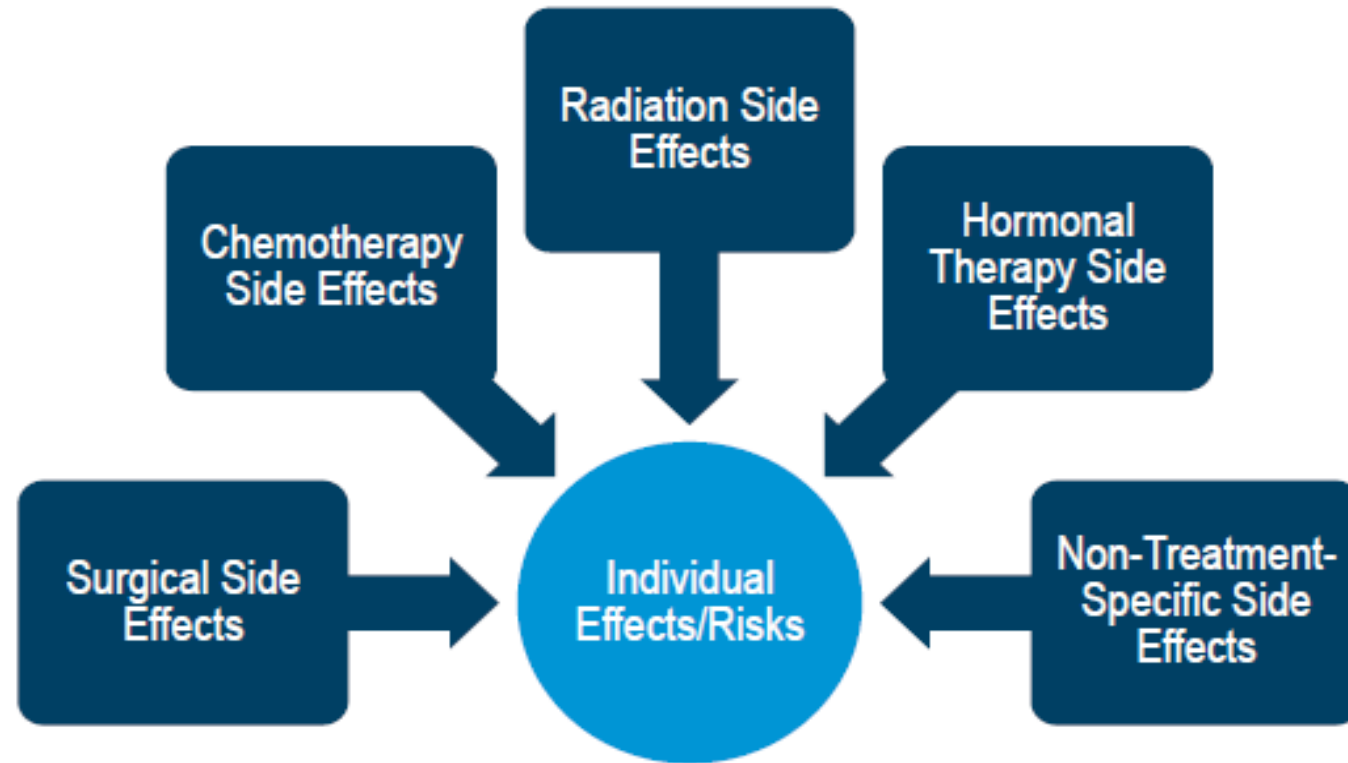
- 1 in 78 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer
- 93% - 5 year survival rate for women diagnosed and treated in the earliest stage of ovarian cancer
- 21,000 women will be diagnosed each year in the U.S.

# Estimated Number of US Cancer Survivors



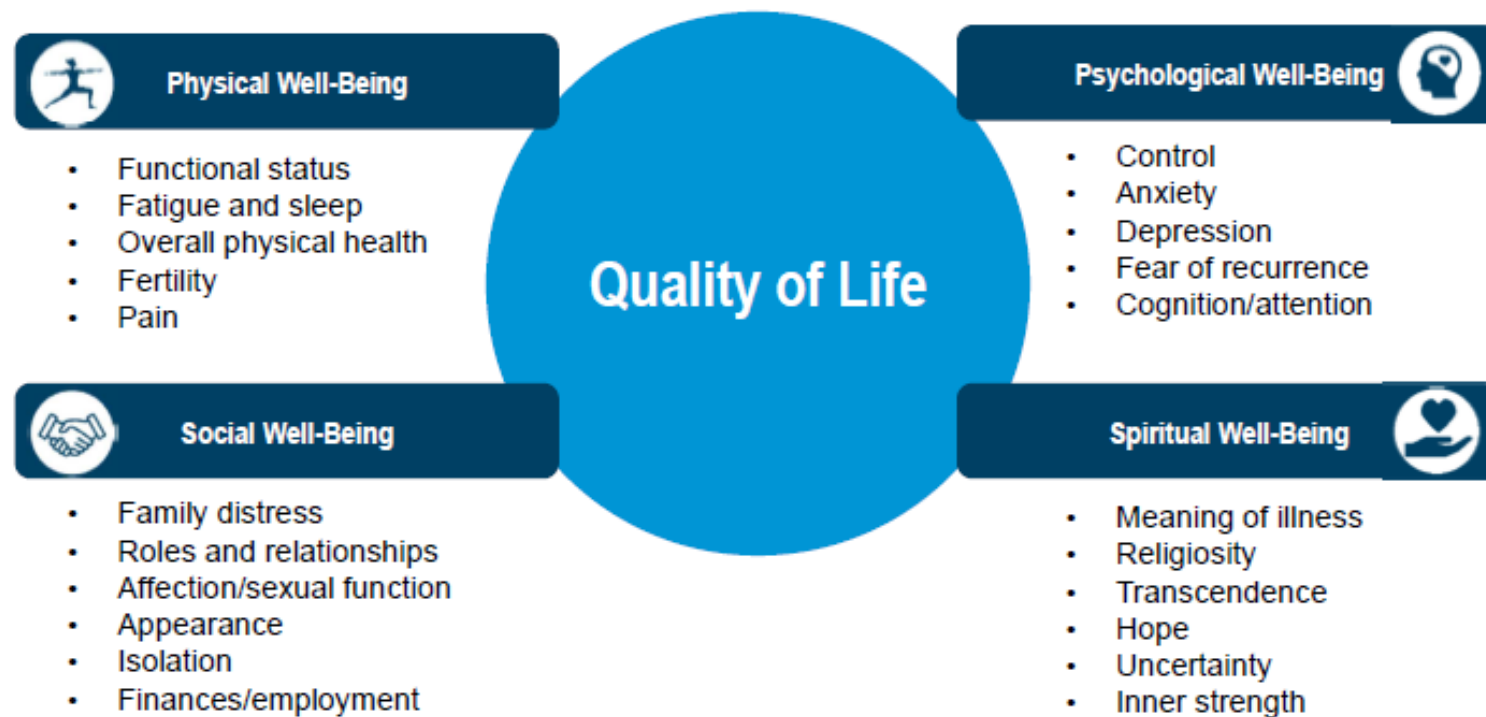
Desantis C, et al. (2014). Cancer treatment and survivorship statistics. CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians, 64(4): 252-71.

# Impacts of Cancer Treatment



American Cancer Society, 2016. Available at:  
<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorshipduringandaftertreatment/nationalcancersurvivorshipresourcecenter/toolsforhealthcareprofessionals/index>

# Cancer Survivor Needs



*Ferrell & Hassey Dow, 1997*

# Quality of Life

- is defined as:

“an individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and values in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, and concerns.”

World Health Organization

A concept which aims to capture well-being

Common facets include personal health (physical, mental, spiritual), relationships, sense of security and safety

# The psychological impact

- **Hope**-hope to stay alive long term, hope for potential new treatments
- **Fear**-of recurrence, death, diminished quality of life
- **Fatigue**-cancer/treatment related fatigue; fatigue of dealing with all this long term
- **Resilience**-discovering one's strength, adapting to a “new normal”, finding meaning



# Balancing Act



# Psychological approaches to care

- Reduce isolation
- Assess for and treat depression and/or anxiety
- Stress management
- Managing health (sleep, exercise, nutrition)

# Depression and Anxiety

- 10-25% of people with cancer experience depression
- 25% of people with cancer experience anxiety
- 30% experience "distress"
- Some may have have pre-existing depression and/or anxiety



# Depression

- Symptoms:
  - Sadness on most days
  - Apathy, lack of interest
  - Decrease interest in activities of daily life
  - Decrease in appetite, sleep disturbance
  - Inability to experience pleasure, enjoy activities of life
- 
- Most reliable question to use in assessing “Are there still things you enjoy?”

# Anxiety

## Symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sweaty palms, elevated heart rate
- Sleep challenges
- Rumination (worry about the future/past)

# Seeking help

- Psychotherapy and/or medication can be very helpful
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Acceptance-Commitment Therapy
- Meaning-centered Therapy



# Adding tools to your toolbox

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- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
- Yoga
- Spiritual or Faith Practices



# When cancer is no longer curable....

- The reality of cancer and potential of death remain very present
- The long term side-effects of treatment and cancer are managed on a daily basis
- Shifting frequently to new treatment regimens becomes “the norm”



# When cancer is no longer curable

- Some people express ambivalence....
  - “ On the one hand, I am so grateful to be alive. On the other hand, the side effects of treatment really limit what I can do. The fatigue, the neuropathies, the chronic pain- it really makes it hard to enjoy life.”
  - “I feel like I am always in limbo, waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

# Managing uncertainty

- Fear of recurrence:
  - Feeling alone
  - Fear of the cancer returning
  - Uncertainty
  - Cancer-related thoughts and difficult to control images
  - Recurrent thoughts
  - Increased distress over time
  - Impact on daily life
  - Death related thoughts



# How to maintain hope despite the uncertainty

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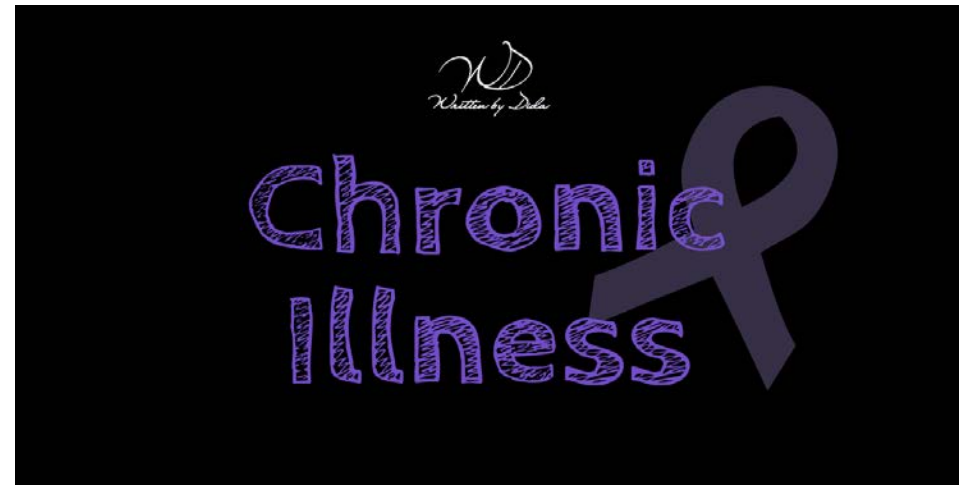
- What brings you joy?
- How can you use moments of uncertainty to be more alive?
- Have you noticed the beauty in your life today?

# Recognize and plan for 'triggers'

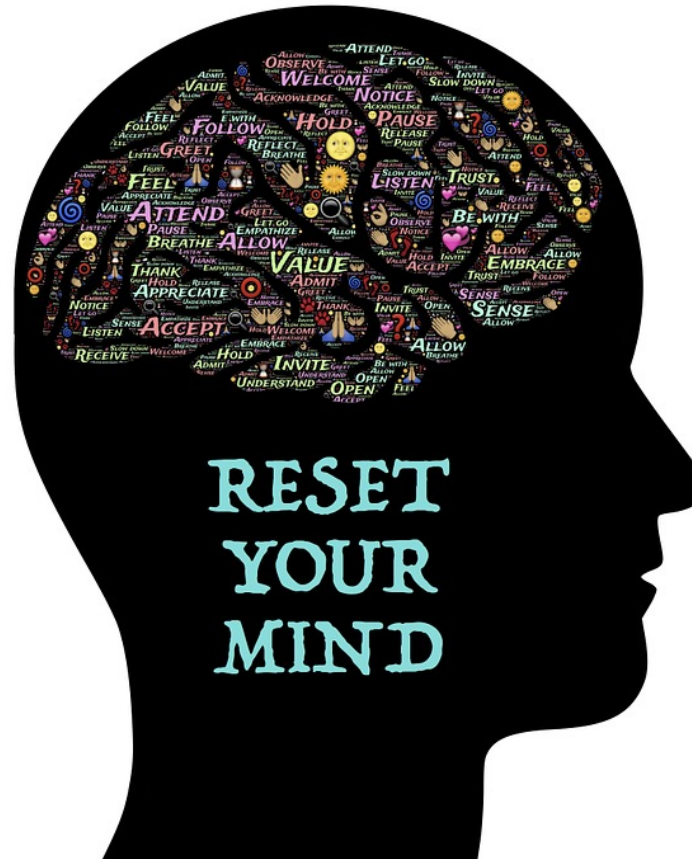
- Normalize and talk about the fears
- Anticipate follow up scans/tests
- Journaling- gratitude and worries
- Examine automatic thoughts, and observe them
- Acceptance of where you are

# The definition of “chronic”...

- ” (of an illness) persisting for a long time or constantly recurring”.
- “(of a problem) long-lasting and difficult to eradicate”.
- Oxford Languages



Mindfulness: involves self-compassion



Life is  
a dance.  
Mindfulness  
is witnessing  
that dance.

mysteriouskaddu.com

# Psychological Outlook

## **Illness Orientation Mindset**

- Loss of control
- No cure
- Hopelessness
- Reactive to disease

## **Wellness Orientation Mindset**

- Options to explore to regain control
- Search for new options/affiliation
- Hopefulness
- Curiosity
- Proactive vs. reactive





# Perspectives...

- In what ways am I wiser now than I was at the time of diagnosis?
- Am I making decisions differently now?
- Are the based on wisdom?
- Do they bring me closer to what I want?



# Strategies for Coping

- Knowing what you want
- Being able to identify ways to obtain it
- Switching to alternative goals when current ones are no longer attainable
- Being able to recognize your skills and abilities
- Knowing how to enhance those skills
- Deciding when asserting control is worth the effort and when it's not

# Finding Hope and Meaning

- What do I hope for –given the circumstances?
- What gives my life meaning?
- What are my priorities now?
- Am I living my life without regrets?
- Who's in my circle of support?

What do I  
have control  
over?

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*God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom  
to know the difference.*

# What do I have control over?

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- How I spend my time
- Who I spend it with
- My attitude toward life
- Compassion for myself



# Communities of Support

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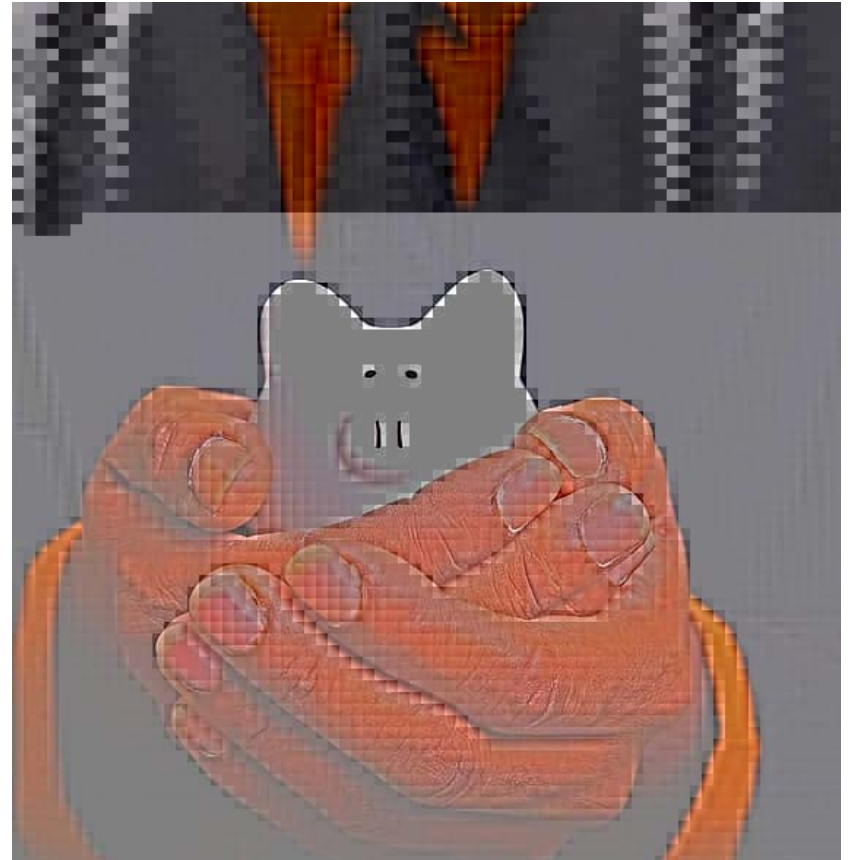
- Support Groups
- Peer Mentors
- Retreats
- Walking groups
- Social gatherings



# Finding Hope

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- Hopes and dreams still exist
- Hope and advanced disease can be strong motivators
- Caution vs. Living Life
- From “Making Today Count” – “should I spend all my money?”







# HOPE

## Hope

- “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

Vaclav Havel

Former president  
of the Czech  
republic and poet

# Living one's best life

- The paradox of “living life” while simultaneously “preparing for death”
- Finding Joy, Meaning, and a sense of Purpose





A photograph of a field of tall, yellow wildflowers, possibly goldenrod, in the foreground. The background is a dense forest of green trees, slightly out of focus. The lighting suggests a sunny day, with some shadows on the foliage.

# Mary Oliver's Wisdom

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild  
and precious life?