



Pathways Women's Cancer Teaching Project

The Pathways Women's Cancer Teaching Project offers two unique educational sessions to residents and medical school, nursing, physician assistant, pastoral care, undergraduate and high school students at over 17 healthcare institutions in New Jersey. The goal of the Project is to foster patient-centered, humanistic care within the healthcare community by allowing residents and students to interact with trained cancer survivors as they relay their cancer journeys in a professional, yet intimate and open setting. The Project uses the powerful tool of personal story telling to leave an educational imprint on the members of the audience. The cancer survivors put a face to the disease of cancer.

The educational sessions include a one-hour panel session during which three breast or gynecological cancer survivors ("Patient Educators" or "PEs") speak for ten minutes each, describing their experiences being diagnosed with cancer, being treated for cancer within the healthcare system and living with cancer. The panel is followed by a 20-minute Q&A, during which the residents or students may ask any questions of the Patient Educators to deepen their understanding.

During a separate, more intensive interviewing session, one Patient Educator is paired with one or more resident or student for approximately 45 minutes for an in-depth discussion. During that time, the resident or student drives the interview, learning the story of the cancer survivor in a more private setting. It is not a role-playing endeavor; rather, it affords the resident or student an opportunity to explore the experience of a cancer survivor, first-hand. The residents or students are asked to give written feedback regarding their impressions of the panel and interviewing sessions and the lessons learned. After the interviewing sessions, the Patient Educators provide their written feedback about their perceptions of the residents or students. Pathways provides copies of all of these forms to the coordinator of the residency program or professor at the medical, physician assistant, nursing or undergraduate school.

The Project is very different from standardized role-playing programs with simulated patients because the resident or medical student is able to talk freely to a person who has lived the cancer experience. The purpose is not for the resident or student to diagnose the Patient Educator, but, rather, to learn about the perspectives, stresses and needs of women with cancer, enabling them to become more empathetic and interpersonally effective at providing healthcare. The Project also helps medical institutions address certain core competencies for residents, such as interpersonal and communication skills and professionalism.

Since its inception in 2003, the Project has reached over 8,500 healthcare professionals and students. In addition to the goal of fostering humanistic, patient-centered healthcare, the Project's other primary goals are: to enhance the quality of relationships between the healthcare professional and the patient; to improve healthcare outcomes and treatment adherence (by improving clinician/patient relationships and enhancing communication); and to empower women with cancer make meaning of their disease and find support among their fellow educators.

Pathways, a program of The Connection in Summit, a non-profit organization, offers many free services to women undergoing cancer treatment and to women with a history of cancer.