

46. Loss of Meaning or Purpose of Life

Many people, when diagnosed with cancer, can feel as though the future has been taken away and that many of the things that had meant a lot to them in the past now have little meaning or purpose. No matter what prognosis has been given, cancer forces people to examine the possibility that they may not live as long as they had once assumed. In fact, many people with cancer react to their diagnosis by preparing for the possibility of their death. Furthermore, the side effects of cancer treatments and sometimes effects of the illness itself severely challenge people's ability to stay involved with activities that would normally have motivated them in the past. It can be difficult to plan things for the future when one feels tied down by pain, nausea, weakness and fatigue, not to mention hospital appointments. Yet having a sense of purpose and direction are vitally important to our mood and sense of well-being.

How can I manage these feelings?

- It can take considerable time to adjust to a diagnosis of cancer, particularly if your illness and its treatment are limiting what you feel you can do. You are certainly not alone in feeling this way and talking to others who have some understanding of how you feel, such as a support group, can be helpful. (See appendix for a list of support groups in your area.)
- It is vitally important to stay involved with activities that provide you with a sense of achievement and/or pleasure (pleasant things to look forward to). Although there may be some things you are no longer able to do, there will be many other activities that you can still do successfully. For example, being a supportive parent or friend can be achieved with a smile and a thoughtful listening ear.
- Think about things you have always enjoyed doing or been good at; which of these can you perhaps still do? On the other hand it may be time to try something new. In the end it doesn't matter how good we are at something (e.g. art, music, crafts), the important thing is that we enjoy the experience of doing it. Even achieving a little bit of housework (peeling the potatoes!), while not glamorous, can lead to a sense of satisfaction that one has achieved something and made a contribution.
- Setting yourself some sensible goals for each day can be very helpful – even something as simple as having a chat with a friend or family member, taking some exercise, doing something pleasurable like having a bath etc?
- You might find it helpful to discuss your feelings with a counsellor. Several counselling services are available offering free, confidential sessions, to anyone affected by a cancer diagnosis. You do not need a doctor's referral. See local and national resources below.
- If you feel entirely hopeless about the future it is very important you speak to a healthcare professional like your doctor or nurse. Depending on what you are feeling, they may be able to refer to a clinical psychologist or a hospital chaplain.

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Livewell South West: Panic This workshop aims to break down some of the myths surrounding panic and help you to manage your panic attacks.</p> <p>Mindfulness Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life's pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p> <p>Managing Anxiety This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological and physical symptoms of anxiety and strategies to manage this including breathing, goal setting and cognitive behaviour therapy</p> <p>Managing Low Mood This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological symptoms of low mood as well as providing strategies to manage this</p> <p>Managing Stress This one hour workshop introduces the symptoms of stress and how the body responds, and provides simple strategies to manage this</p> <p>Sleep Feel, Feel Well Introduces ways to support restful sleep</p>	<p>Livewell South West: To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p>Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Provides a free counselling service to patients, their family and carers</p>	<p>Mustard Tree Macmillan Support Centre at Derriford Hospital. Counselling also available at the Outreach Centres (Kingsbridge, Liskeard & Tavistock). For more information, please call 01752 430060</p>
<p>Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care Chaplain service is available to offer support when feelings of uncertainty and worry are uppermost</p>	<p>Pastoral Care Team: 01752 792313 Mustard Tree staff</p>
<p>Counselling Service within the support centre and Outreach triangle centres Available for cancer patients, their carers and families</p>	<p>Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre One hour appointments See counselling leaflets for further information Tel : 01752 430060</p>

Local Resources continued:

Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers	Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
Other Resources	Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.	www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)

Further Information:

Macmillan booklets: – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre
Talking about your cancer
How are you feeling?