



HOPE & HEALING

A guide to helping survivors navigate through their journey

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Winter 2026 Issue

Northside Hospital Cancer Institute Call Center: [404-531-4444](tel:404-531-4444)

NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL
CANCER INSTITUTE
BUILT TO BEAT CANCER



Asking For and Accepting Help From Others in the Context of a Cancer Diagnosis

By: *Lisa Mayes, LCSW, OSW-C*

In your daily life, you may have family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, fellow center of worship congregants and others, who are willing and able to support you while you cope with a cancer diagnosis and treatment. They may provide you with emotional, spiritual, physical, practical (meals, transportation, cleaning, help with childcare), nutritional or financial assistance and more.

Both asking for and accepting help can pose a significant challenge for oncology patients for several reasons. Firstly, it can feel like yet another loss of independence, leading to feelings of vulnerability or of being a burden to others. Additionally, there is sometimes a fear of judgment from others or yourself, due to expectations, which can stem from how you were raised, or the current culture, which tends to promote "powering through" adversity.

While asking for/accepting help can be challenging, it can also be a gift to others who are looking for an opportunity to support you. Thinking about how you might respond if a dear friend needed support could help you reframe your thoughts about asking for and accepting help in a healthy manner. Another bonus is that the acceptance of help from others can foster growth in you and your supporters, which will strengthen your relationships.

Below are some considerations for requesting and accepting help:

- Think about what you need help with, who can help and how they can help.
- Be as specific as possible about your needs (when, how often). People typically need direction on how to help.
- Consider the abilities/skills and limitations of those you are asking to get the best fit for your needs.
- Be flexible about the way your supporters perform tasks (for example cleaning or laundry).
- Consider streamlining through a "meal train" app, an online communication website, schedule or a person who can organize your support system with the delegation of tasks.
- Consider the time and place when asking; face to face is always best, if possible, to avoid miscommunication.
- Use effective communication strategies such as "I-statements."
- Hire help if that is an option financially, such as cleaning or lawn services.
- Explore free community resource options, through churches, schools and other organizations.
- Work with an oncology social worker for further guidance.

For additional support, please contact Northside Behavioral Health Services at [404-851-8960](tel:404-851-8960) or behavioralhealthservices@northside.com.

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ASK AN EXPERT



Benefits of Genetic Testing After a Cancer Diagnosis

By: *Tim Hakim, MS, CGC*

What is genetic testing for hereditary cancer?

About 10-15% of people with cancer have an inherited predisposition for certain kinds of cancer. (This increases to about 20-25% of people with either ovarian or metastatic prostate cancer.) A hereditary cancer predisposition means that a mutation (broken copy) of a gene is inherited from either parent, which leads to higher cancer risks. Genetic testing can help discover if someone has a hereditary cancer predisposition.

What are the benefits of genetic testing after a cancer diagnosis?

Genetic testing can help us determine whether the patient or their family members may be at increased risk of other cancers in the future. It can also help clarify if there may be a risk for other family members to have inherited a cancer predisposition.



Testing the person with cancer is generally considered more informative than testing their children who have not had cancer. This is because if the child does not have a mutation identified in their genetic testing, their parent may still have had a mutation that was not passed on to them but could have been passed on to their other children.

In addition, genetic testing can sometimes change the treatment of the patient's current cancer. Genetic testing can also indicate that specific targeted therapies may be more useful for a particular patient.

What are the advantages of meeting with a genetic counselor before and after genetic testing?

Genetic counselors are health care providers with graduate training in genetics and can communicate complex medical information to patients. A genetic counselor will usually meet with a patient before testing to review their personal and family history of cancer. They can then determine if genetic testing is recommended and explain possible genetic findings. By documenting the family's cancer history, they can increase the likelihood that insurance will cover genetic testing when appropriate. A genetic counselor will explain the benefits and risks of genetic testing to help the patient make an informed decision.



After genetic testing results are available, a genetic counselor can explain any findings and medical management recommendations. They can also identify other family members who may benefit from genetic testing.

Which family members should be informed if a patient has a positive genetic testing result? What should they be told?

Ideally, at least living first-degree relatives (children, siblings and parents) should be informed of a positive genetic test result, as each has a 50% chance of carrying the same mutation. Beyond that, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces/nephews may be appropriate to inform about a positive result. We encourage cascade testing, meaning results from one relative inform whom else to test. For example, if a sibling tests positive for the mutation, we know there is a chance it could be passed on to their children. But if the sibling tests negative, there is no concern about the mutation being passed on to their children. Often, who to inform also depends on the family dynamics and who someone feels comfortable informing. Northside genetic counselors provide patients with a family letter to give to relatives. The letter explains the gene in which a mutation was found and how family members can get tested.

What does it mean to receive an "uncertain result?"

About 40% of people will have a variant of uncertain significance (VUS) found during genetic testing. A VUS is a variation in one of the genes tested for which the lab lacks sufficient information to classify as either harmful or benign. Individual variants are rare (and hard to classify), but VUSs are a very common finding. Genetic counselors typically aren't too concerned about VUSs and don't recommend changing medical management based on them.

If the lab later reclassifies the VUS as more evidence is collected, a Northside genetic counselor will let the patient know. Most VUSs that are reclassified are moved to benign, indicating that the lab is confident the variant does not affect cancer risk. Also, while an individual VUS may not have much known about it, the gene it is in usually does contain crucial information. So, we can say the VUS is in a gene associated with colon and uterine cancer, for example, and there may be no personal or family history of these cancers. A genetic counselor can help explain the particulars of a patient's VUS, including analyzing the variant in the context of the patient's personal and family history.

Closing Thoughts

Cancer takes a terrible toll. But when we can proactively identify people who are at higher risk due to an inherited mutation in a cancer predisposition gene, we can target appropriate medical management to prevent cancer or catch it at an earlier, easier-to-treat stage. Hereditary cancer genetic testing is one way we can thwart cancer and improve outcomes for future generations. For more information or to speak with a genetic counselor or Cancer Genetics Program staff member, please call at [404-851-6284](tel:404-851-6284) or email genetics@northside.com.



BOOST YOUR HEALTH & WELLNESS



Take Advantage of Northside's Survivorship Nutrition Program

By: Savannah Duffy, MS, RDN, CSO, LD

Did you know that research indicates cancer survivors are some of the most motivated individuals to make dietary changes for their health?¹ This makes sense because survivors can have a wide range of nutrition goals including weight management, improving the lingering side effects of treatment, maintaining bone density, reducing cancer recurrence and so much more. In the spring of 2023, Northside Hospital Cancer Institute created a Survivorship Nutrition Program as a part of their existing Oncology Nutrition Program to help address these concerns.

Patients who have completed primary treatment for cancer are eligible for nutrition appointments with a Northside survivorship registered dietitian nutritionist. These appointments are conducted via telehealth or phone call so that they can be done from the comfort of the patient's home (even from the kitchen)! Signs that someone is ready for the survivorship nutrition program include completion of chemotherapy, radiation therapy or surgery. If a patient is on maintenance medication such as hormone therapy, they are also appropriate.

Patients can meet with a registered Northside dietitian for either a one-time consultation to answer questions about the relationship between diet and cancer, or for a longer-term series of follow-ups to address lingering symptoms or disease management concerns.

The program is tailored to each individual patient to address their specific needs. Many patients have reported increased energy, improved lab work and stable weight. Additionally, patients have reported feeling more confident and in control of their health after meeting with Northside's registered dietitians.

To request a referral, patients can reach out to the nutrition department directly at outpatient.nutrition@northside.com or by calling [404-236-8036](tel:404-236-8036).

Reference:

1. Nayak P, Paxton RJ, Holmes H, Thanh Nguyen H, Elting LS. Racial and ethnic differences in health behaviors among cancer survivors. *Amer J of Prev Med.* 2015;48(6):729-736.



Recipe Corner*

Orange Mint Twist Mocktail

Ingredients (serves 6)

- 3 cups orange juice
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 12 mint leaves
- 1 cup sparkling water
- 1 orange, thinly sliced

Directions

1. In a pitcher, combine the orange juice and honey and mix until well incorporated.
2. Add 8 mint leaves to the juice, crush the mint with a spoon and stir to infuse the flavor into the juice. Remove the leaves.
3. Pour the sparkling water into the pitcher.
4. Pour into glasses and garnish with mint and orange slices.



*Recipe credit: Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center – Cook for Your Life

Winter Cancer Awareness Months

January: Cervical Cancer

February: Gallbladder/Bile Duct Cancer

March: Colorectal Cancer, Kidney Cancer, Multiple Myeloma

Do you have a question you would like answered by an expert or a story to share in a future issue of Hope & Healing? If so, please send your questions or stories to survivornewsletter@northside.com.



STORIES OF HOPE & HEALING*

Survivor/Thriver Story: Meet Kim



What were the events that led up to your cancer diagnosis?

Ovarian Cancer is the silent killer. Most women who have the disease are not diagnosed until it is stage III or stage IV. In August 2024, I saw my OB/GYN, [Dr. Winifred Soufi](#), and she noticed cysts

on my ovaries. Dr. Soufi asked how I felt, so I told her that I had abdominal pain, and that I have ascites (fluid buildup in the abdomen). In December 2024, she suggested I have an ultrasound. Ultrasounds should not hurt, but mine did. Dr. Soufi sent me to Northside Hospital for another ultrasound. It hurt too. She then sent me to [Dr. Adam Pyrzak](#), a gynecologic oncologist and he scheduled an MRI.

The ultrasounds and the MRI did not show any problems, but blood tests showed I was menopausal, peri-menopausal and that I was kicking out estrogen. Dr. Pyrzak thought the estrogen may have been feeding cancer. I decided to have both ovaries and fallopian tubes removed. During the surgery he also took biopsies. After the surgery, he told my family and me that he saw no evidence of cancer, and it was “much ado about nothing.” On March 23, 2025, I was diagnosed with Stage IIB Adult Granulosa Cell Ovarian Cancer via a phone call from Dr. Pyrzak. He was blown away, and I was too. Dr. Soufi called the next day to talk to me about my test results. She too was blown away by the diagnosis. An appointment with Dr. Pyrzak was quickly scheduled to determine a plan.

What treatment did you receive?

I had a bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (surgery to remove my ovaries and fallopian tubes) with biopsies and six cycles of chemotherapy. I told Dr. Pyrzak it was time to put my big girl panties on and jump the next hurdle. He said, “Don’t lose that attitude! That’s what you need to fight cancer!” Our attitudes make a huge difference. Making the decision to thrive during treatment is the best decision you can make.

Did you utilize patient support resources at NHCI? If so, which would you recommend?

Yes, the nurses and doctors at the Northside Hospital Infusion Center took excellent care of me. I also spoke with a Northside counselor and attended activities at Cancer Support Community Atlanta. My recommendations are to get to know the nurses who take care of you and speak to a counselor if you’re feeling depressed (counselors can help put things into perspective). Additionally, find a support group.

What advice do you have for someone navigating their treatment and recovery journey?

I am a retired elementary school teacher and many years ago, on the first day of school, a kindergartener asked me if my name was Kimberly Roberts. I replied, “No, my name is KIM POSSIBLE!” (the popular Disney channel character). That was it! My students were The Little Possibles and I was KP or Ms. Roberts. When I had something to teach, I would play the Kim Possible theme song or the Mission Impossible theme song. We would sing and dance, and I would lean in towards The Little Possibles and say, “This is your job if you so choose to accept it!” Then I would teach my lesson. Our mantra is a quote by Audrey Hepburn, “Nothing is impossible. The word itself says, ‘I’m possible.’” Not one Little Possible ever said, “I can’t or I won’t.” They tried their best. Always.

Kim Possible took over once I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I envisioned Gladiator from the original movie as the carboplatin. He was slaying all the ovarian cancer cells in my body. Then I envisioned Jaws as paclitaxel chomping all the ovarian cancer cells that he could as well as eating those that were missed by Gladiator. When I focused on Gladiator and Jaws doing their jobs, I felt in control of my cancer journey. I was out to beat ovarian cancer and I DID!

How far out are you from treatment or is treatment ongoing?

I was told in August that I am in remission. That declaration from Dr. Pyrzak, [Alli Cansler](#) (his NP) and my brother was mind boggling. I had fought for several months and to be told I was finished fighting the good fight was a new and different sensation. I am Kim Possible; I was not finished fighting. I had never been told by my pediatric cardiologists I was free of heart disease, so being N.E.D. (No Evidence of Disease) felt strange to me.

Closing Thoughts.

If you are fighting cancer, then find your POSSIBLE. YOU can do it! You have the strength within yourself to fight the good fight. Find your Gladiator and Jaws. In your mind envision them crunching, slaying, slicing and dicing the cancer cells that disappear from your body once they have been obliterated. Put your big girl panties (or your big boy tighy-whities on) and FEEL POSSIBLE!



*Patients' stories are based on individual experiences. The process from diagnosis through treatment may vary as well as symptoms, side effects and provider recommendations.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT & RESOURCES

NHCI Partner Spotlight - Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN)

PANCREATIC CANCER ACTION NETWORK

Purpose of the organization.

We are the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN), the first organization dedicated to fighting pancreatic cancer in a comprehensive way. Our mission is to take bold action to improve the lives of everyone impacted by pancreatic cancer by advancing scientific research, sharing knowledge, advocating for patients and building community.

Population that PanCAN serves.

As the largest pancreatic cancer-related organization, we collaborate with the country's leading experts on developing earlier detection, better treatments and outcomes, protecting federal funding for research and meeting the needs of anyone impacted by pancreatic cancer, including underserved communities and those facing barriers to care.

Resources that PanCAN provides for patients, survivors and/or care partners.

One of our unique patient programs is PanCAN's Know Your Tumor service. This provides eligible patients with information about their tumor's biology through free tissue biomarker testing. Through our Survivor Network, volunteers serve as ambassadors of hope for anyone affected by pancreatic cancer. Our Survivor Council plays a critical role in our leadership team.

For care partners, we provide information and resources, including support groups, to guide them through caring for a loved one facing the disease. Access all the resources described by calling Patient Services at [877-412-8735](tel:877-412-8735).

Outreach programs that PanCAN sponsors in the community.

The PurpleStride walk/run is PanCAN's biggest community event of the year — bringing together the entire community of patients, survivors, families, friends, researchers, physicians, churches and more at events across the nation for a day of hope, inspiration and fun. PurpleStride Atlanta returns to Perimeter Mall on April 25, 2026. Registration is free. We would love to see you there!

Volunteer opportunities that PanCAN offers and the best way to get involved.

PanCAN offers a robust and vibrant volunteer community of individuals dedicated to creating a world where all pancreatic cancer patients thrive. Volunteer opportunities include advocacy, raising awareness in the community, local event organization, sending cards of encouragement and support and so much more. The best way to get involved is to email the Atlanta PanCAN Community Relationship Manager, Quincy Newson at qnewson@pancan.org or complete the [volunteer interest form](#).

Partnership between PanCAN and Northside Hospital Cancer Institute (NHCI)

Our partnership with NHCI is very special. In addition to providing free literature and resources for Northside to share with its pancreatic cancer patients, we actively participate in each other's community events, such as the NHCI Patient and Care Partner Education Conference, lunch and learns and the annual PanCAN PurpleStride walk in Atlanta. We are excited to strengthen and extend our partnership in the future to ensure the best outcomes for all pancreatic cancer patients.



NHCI, PanCAN & Cancer Support Community Atlanta staff 2025



Northside at PurpleStride 2025



Give Art Therapy a Try

By: Christy Andrews, Executive Director, CSC Atlanta



Creativity can be a powerful pathway to healing, and Cancer Support Community Atlanta (CSC Atlanta) continues to expand its art therapy offerings to help participants process emotions, reduce stress and reconnect with joy. Every month, CSC Atlanta hosts a Virtual Restorative Art Studio, an online class that invites participants to explore a different creative and therapeutic activity during each session. Prompts are shared in advance for those who want to prepare, but participants are always welcome to simply jump in. All materials used can be found around the home, making this a welcoming, low-pressure way to experience the healing benefits of art from anywhere.

In addition to virtual offerings, CSC Atlanta will continue its beloved in-person programs such as Art & Dinner and Art Therapy Retreats, which provide opportunities for deeper connection and shared creative expression. To further build a vibrant creative community, CSC Atlanta is partnering with Cabbagetown Arts Center and their professional art therapists. This collaboration begins in January with a linocut class, offering participants a chance to learn a new artistic technique while engaging in meaningful self-expression in a supportive environment.

In February, CSC Atlanta will launch a Ceramic Studio class held every Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. This beginner-friendly, four-week series invites participants to explore clay as a tool for relaxation, grounding and healing. Led by an art therapist, the class focuses on the calming power of working with your hands while learning basic ceramic techniques. Participants may attend a single session or all four, creating flexibility for different schedules and energy levels. Together, these art therapy programs offer cancer survivors a creative space to heal, connect and rediscover their inner resilience—one brushstroke, carve or piece of clay at a time.

To learn more and register for any of CSC Atlanta's art therapy programs, visit www.cscatlanta.org.



GET INVOLVED

Northside Hosts BMT and CAR T-Cell Therapy Reunion at the Georgia Aquarium

The blood and marrow transplant (BMT) and CAR T-cell therapy survivor reunion was held on October 11, 2025, at the Georgia Aquarium. Over 900 patients and care partners attended this special event. Please visit the [Northside Hospital News Center](#) for more details and a video from the reunion.





EVENTS & CANCER CELEBRATIONS

CANCER SCREENING & PREVENTION

[Skin & Prostate Cancer Screenings](#)

March 12, 2026 @ Northside Hospital Cancer Institute Radiation Oncology – Cherokee from 5:30-8 p.m.

April 16, 2026 @ The Cancer Support Center at Northside Hospital –Gwinnett from 5:30-8 p.m.

[Built To Quit – Smoking and Tobacco Cessation Course](#)

Next 6-week session start date: March 17, 2026

Our **Built To Quit** courses are led by a trained smoking and tobacco cessation facilitator.

Behavioral therapists, nutritionists and respiratory therapists visit the group to provide added smoking and tobacco cessation support and guidance. Classes are offered weekly during afternoon and evening hours. Remote/online options are available. Participants will receive nicotine replacement therapy (if qualified) and a participant's workbook. Lunch/dinner is provided for onsite classes.

For more information, please visit northside.com/community-wellness/built-to-quit, call [404-780-7653](tel:404-780-7653) or email smokingcessation@northside.com.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

National Dress in Blue Day for Colon Cancer Awareness

March 6, 2026

[Lustgarten Pancreatic Cancer Research Walk](#)

March 15, 2026 @ 8:30 a.m. @ the Porsche Experience Center in Atlanta



[National Brain Tumor Society's Georgia Brain Tumor Walk & Race](#)

April 25, 2026 from 8-10:45 a.m. at The Battery in Atlanta



CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY

[Cancer Transitions: Moving Beyond Treatment](#)

Next 4-week program begins February 6, 2026 from 11-12:30 p.m., followed by another program in May 2026.

Cancer Transitions is a free four-week workshop designed to help cancer survivors make the transition from active treatment to survivorship. Each week participants will meet for a 90-minute virtual session to discuss important topics focused on health and well-being. For more information and registration, please contact Lauren Walch at lauren@cscatlanta.org.



[Understanding Lung Cancer: From Screening Through Survivorship](#)

February 12, 2026 from 11:30 a.m.- noon

This is a regional program in Lawrenceville offering a panel of physicians discussing all aspects of lung cancer care—from when to screen to available treatment options. Lunch will be offered and the program will follow. Visit cscatlanta.org and click the calendar button for more information or to register.

[Heart Health: During & After Cancer Treatment](#)

February 24, 2026 from 11:30 am - noon

This is a regional program in Duluth offering a discussion by experts on risk factors that develop with a cancer diagnosis. Lunch will be offered and the program will follow. Visit cscatlanta.org and click the calendar button for more information or to register.

NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL EVENTS

[NHCI Survivor Retreat](#)

April 24-26, 2026

This is a weekend retreat for survivors who have completed their primary cancer treatment and are in their first year post-treatment. The retreat has a facilitated program that offers time for discussion and planned activities in a comfortable setting (e.g., discussion groups, nature walking, massage, art, etc.) This retreat is offered at no cost to NHCI patients. Find more information at [Cancer Survivor Retreat | Northside Hospital](#). Applications are open.

NHCI 2025 Patient & Care Partner Conference

September 12, 2026 @ The Hotel at Avalon in Alpharetta
Save the date. More details to follow.

Metastatic Breast Cancer (MBC) Retreat

September 18-20, 2026

This is a weekend retreat facilitated by a clinical oncology social worker and oncology nurse. Registration is offered at no cost to MBC patients and their care partner. Save the date. More details to follow. Please contact kymberly.duncan@northside.com for more information.

NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL FOUNDATION EVENTS

[Northside Hospital Cancer Survivor Celebration with the Atlanta Braves](#)

March 31, 2026 @ 5:45 p.m. @ Truist Park

Visit the [Northside Hospital Foundation webpage](#) for more information.



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