

Caring Ways Your Organization Can Support an Employee with Cancer

It's hard to know how to support an employee with cancer, especially when not every patient is open to sharing details about their diagnosis with co-workers. Even if the patient is open to receiving support, he or she may not know how to ask for help or simply isn't comfortable vocalizing his or her needs. Whether your colleague was just diagnosed, going through treatment, or transitioning back to work after finishing treatment, there are supportive things your company can do to help make that phase in the cancer journey a little smoother and provide some much-needed encouragement. For patients who were just diagnosed, the following gestures can go a long way:

- **Set up a meal train.** Organize meals for the patient via services like Meal Train or Take Them a Meal, which allow the patient to specify food preferences and delivery times that work best.
- **Organize transportation support.** Create a schedule where co-workers can regularly offer to provide transportation for the patient and keep him or her company during treatment. Or, offer to pay for a monthly parking pass at the treatment facility.
- **Send a care package.** A customized collection of work-related trinkets or comforting items will help the patient stay connected to the office.

For patients who are in the thick of treatment – surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or any other form of care – these acts of support help remind the patient just how many people care:

- **Host a milestone party.** Hosting a surprise party on the patient's last day of treatment – or other important milestones like a successful surgery – can be a fun way to help the patient feel celebrated and encouraged throughout their cancer journey.
- **Donate vacation days.** Talk to your human resources department about donating some of your vacation days to the patient. Not every company will accommodate such a request, but it can't hurt to ask.
- **Baby (or pet) sit.** Offer to babysit and/or take care of the patient's pet and alleviate some of the pressures of everyday life.
- **Use your green thumb.** Offer to tend to the patient's garden or lawn.
- **Join an advocacy group.** Sometimes the best way to show your support is by attending cancer advocacy events that the patient is passionate about, such as a local 5K benefitting cancer research or a community fundraiser.

The transition back to work can be challenging for many patients. Help ease your colleague back into the swing of things with some of these simple ideas:

- **Decorate their desk.** Leaving short, personalized sticky notes with words of encouragement on the patient's desk can lift spirits and help the patient know he or she is on everyone's minds.
- **Send a company-wide "welcome back" email.** Celebrate the patient's return to work with a company-wide email congratulating him or her on finishing treatment and returning to work.
- **Host a "welcome back" party.** Show the patient how excited everyone is about his or her cancer treatment milestone by hosting a "welcome back" party.

Keep in mind that every patient is different, so it's important to have a discussion with the employee about personal privacy wishes before organizing any company-wide gestures of support.



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