

Cancer Survivors Often Lie



I was watching part of that new FOX Television series the other night, "Lie to Me" and it struck me that anyone who hasn't had cancer should be taught how to recognize those signals, the ones that tell you you're not quite getting the truth.

Ever asked a cancer survivor how they are? What you probably heard was "Hey, I'm fine", "I'm doing good", "I feel very lucky". Now carefully look into their eyes, because if you believed them and said "I'm so glad, see you soon", you've just been conned. They lied. We don't do it with malice, or to hurt people, or because chemo drugs turn us into pathological liars. We do it to protect ourselves mostly, but also to protect our family and our friends.

What I'm saying is that most cancer survivors do feel "great", "good", "lucky" most of the time, but a lot of times we don't. But who wants to hear "Well actually the chemo has left my feet hurting, I can't turn my neck from side to side, I wake up in the middle of the night in pain, I have panic attacks especially when check ups get close, I fear my cancer coming back and I go in the closet and just cry". Now you're sorry you asked the question in the first place, because, one, did you really want to hear all that? And, two, now you feel miserable too.

That's why support groups are a God send. Its where you can let out all those emotions and tell people how you really feel. And surprisingly everyone else is feeling the same way too. I'm always marveled at the ladies in my own support group. Sometimes some are up and some are down. We kind of take it in turns, but you can bet that the person who needed help last time is there helping the ones who need it most this time. It's a bond like no other.

That doesn't mean that these feelings should be locked up until support group time. We just need a little encouragement. So, if you meet a survivor in the street, and its someone you care about, watch their body language as they're telling you they're "doing great". Behind that big smile is a person wanting to scream out "I feel totally *#\$*@@@ awful and I've just bought shares in Kleenex!"

So what do you do? What do you say? In my case, I just want to be hugged. It says a thousand words. It says I know you're having a hard time and I love you and care about you. And if you really want to know how I'm doing, while you're giving me that hug, whisper in my ear and say "OK, so now tell me the truth!"

Kay Kerbyson is Secretary of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer. Los Alamos patients and survivors can find local help at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org.