THIS MONTH AT NCAF

August is National Immunization Awareness Month

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Hello,

Pap and HPV tests are part of life for women over 30, with doctors recommending a test every five years, but many remain unclear what HPV is and why it is important to be treated if you have it.

HPV and Cancer

HPV stands for human papillomavirus, something one in four people will contract in their lives. It is a virus with more than 100 variants, most of which can be dealt with by your own immune system, however there are variants that can be more of a problem. Men can be infected with HPV too, however there are no tests for male HPV, and so symptoms such as genital warts can be the first sign of problem for men.
HPV lives on the skin, and is transmitted through intimate genital contact, with those that cause genital warts considered low risk issues that can be treated with medication. However, there are other forms, known as high-risk HPVs, that if left untreated can over time, turn normal cells into cancerous ones.

In particular, nearly all cases of cervical cancer of any kind are caused by HPV infection, with around 70% of cases coming from HPV-16 or HPV-18. In addition, oral cancers, as well as less common cancers including penile, vaginal, anal and vulvar cancers can all be caused by variations of the HPV infection.

It is important to note that even with a positive identification of an HPV infection, the risk of that becoming cancer is extremely small. In most cases, HPV can be treated and managed and not be an issue for you in the long term. However, if you are diagnosed with a high-risk form of HPV, then it is important to discuss things with your doctor. Even in these higher risk infections, the chances of it becoming cancer remain small.

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**On The Lighter Side**

*Win a Live Virtual Comedy Performance*

HumorMe, a non-profit entertainment organization, provides live shows by world-class musicians, magicians, circus performers, comedians, and more. Their performances can now be sent as gift deliveries to help people coping with cancer related medical issues and veterans dealing with cancer and PTSD.

HumorMe offers the gift of short private virtual performances for people in difficult medical situations. These gift performances from friends and family bring cheer to loved ones having a rough time. As part of their nonprofit model, a portion of each transaction will bring a performance to an individual without the means (or friends) to provide one.

NATCAF is proud to be partnering with HumorMe to provide a free Zoom show that will be specifically tailored for the winner of our joke contest. *What joke contest?* As a way of introducing these wonderful and talented entertainers, we are giving away a free show to the person who sends in the best family friendly joke. The winner will get to invite as many people as they like to experience the show “together”. The second and third runner up entries will receive a $10.00 gift card. All entries must be received no later than July 7th. Send joke entries to: social@natcaf.org
The Gift of Hope

For those of us who are double challenged with the fear, stress, and illness of Covid-19, and who are also struggling with cancer, the challenges have been epic and daunting. And it will take the efforts of many to help those affected return to any semblance of normalcy, and it will take time. The National Cancer Assistance Foundation can aid children and families suffering from cancer who need help paying for the costs of daily life. We provide direct financial assistance. If you are having difficulties with bills, we urge you to contact our organization. We may be able to help.

Lung Cancer is the most common cancer suffered around the world. It is also the biggest killer in terms of cancer deaths too, and since the 1950’s, scientists have told us about the connection between smoking and lung cancer. Despite that connection, millions still smoke every day, but that has created another problem, the lung cancer stigma.

If someone tells you they have lung cancer, what is your honest first thought? Its very likely to be about smoking or bringing it onto yourself. That is the lung cancer stigma, and it can cause additional pain and stress for sufferers. Many patients when diagnosed with lung cancer are so ashamed, they often ask doctors to lie to their families about the type of cancer they have. Having the stress of maintaining that lie through treatment is just one more thing that patients would be better off not having, yet the lung cancer stigma makes it a reality. Some patients even continue the lie after death, with obituaries citing cause of death as another form of cancer, but it should not be this way, and the reality of lung cancer shows this. For instance, around half of patients diagnosed with lung cancer have never smoked in their lives, or who smoked and quit many years previously. The idea that everyone who suffers from lung cancer is somehow at fault themselves is provably incorrect. Yet this lung cancer stigma continues.

It’s not just patients either, lung cancer stigma affects research too, with lung cancer receiving a small fraction of government funding that other common cancers receive. With less money comes less researchers, and that means less research and fewer breakthroughs in treatments too. A viscous circle formed by the lung cancer stigma that is largely built on misunderstandings in the first place.

There are measures to combat this, with World Lung Cancer Day first appearing in 2012 and held every year since, the opportunity to raise awareness of how this cancer is not necessarily a result of smoking, with patients needing support as any other would. It is only through awareness that the lung cancer stigma may be confronted, and with it gain the funding needed to help find a way to combat this terrible disease.
As treatments improve, early diagnosis becomes more common and prognosis more positive, more people than ever recover from cancer and continue on with their lives. We often talk about the cancer survivor story, what do they do, how do they move on, but the reality is it is different for everyone.

Not only is every cancer survivor unique, but so is their experience with cancer, and as a result, how they respond afterwards. However, as we can talk to more and more cancer survivors, medical professionals have a much better understanding of the needs of a cancer survivor today than they did even just a decade ago. Cancer treatment, and the entire experience of living with cancer places an extraordinary strain on mental health, and it is perhaps no surprise that mental health support is something that a cancer survivor will find extremely helpful in both the short and long term. There are many approaches to providing this, but support groups allow a cancer survivor to meet with others in a similar situation and share their own experiences and thoughts.

Because having cancer and going through treatment becomes so all-encompassing, many feel that it takes over who they are. It strips away both individuality and personality, leaving just the cancer patient as the only thing people see. Lifting that pressure when given the all clear leaves a need to reassert who you are. They don’t want to go from being a cancer patient to being a cancer survivor, the goal is to be who they are, the individual they were before diagnosis.

What is also common among survivors then, is a need to achieve goals, do the things that they always put off before, try something different and be who they are, not the disease they once had. If you are supporting someone through cancer treatment, remember that when they come out the other side, they will need the support...
to be themselves again. They will always be a cancer survivor, but you have to let each person be themselves, first and foremost.

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