

Going On With Life: Women Juggling Cancer And Career

U.S. Employers Rank Last As Source Of Support For Working Women With Cancer

(NAPSA)—For Shirley Mertz, continuing to work throughout the past 14 years as she battled breast cancer was not only natural but also critical to her well-being.

“After I was diagnosed with breast cancer, continuing to live a normal life was extremely important, and for me, normal meant working,” said Mertz, a former assistant superintendent for a public high school district in suburban Chicago, Ill., who is now 59 and a full-time breast cancer advocate. “I was fortunate enough to have a sympathetic employer and compassionate co-workers, but I had to look outside my office for the support and information I needed to cope with cancer. I never really considered that workplace resources might be an option.”

Mertz’s experience is echoed in the results of a national Harris Interactive survey of working women diagnosed with cancer, which, astonishingly, found that a mere 1 percent of them consider their company a source of information or support in coping with their illness. Although they are generally satisfied with interpersonal support and report an ability to balance the demands of their illness and their careers, many survey participants are in fact suffering treatment-related difficulties on the job, such as fatigue, nausea and hair loss, but are not finding help in workplace



programs. The survey was initiated by Cosmetic Executive Women Foundation’s (CEWF) Cancer and Careers program and supported by a grant from Roche.

Carlotta Jacobson, President of CEW, a leading trade organization in the beauty industry, says it’s essential for employers to find ways to anticipate and address the needs of their employees who have cancer.

“Our survey shows that, despite their stoic attitude, women with cancer often struggle with physical, emotional and other issues in the workplace,” said Jacobson. “To address their needs, we’ve developed the Cancer and Careers program, which includes free information, guidance and tools for both employees and their managers.”

Cancer and Careers is an online and offline resource for working women with cancer and their

employers. The program’s Web site, www.cancerandcareers.org, includes more than 100 online articles, downloadable tools, charts and checklists, and a searchable database of 400-plus cancer resources. CEWF also offers the Managing Through Cancer program to help managers, HR professionals and CEOs initiate policy changes, develop supportive services, and design flexible work arrangements.

CEWF’s survey also revealed that women with cancer need more than just workplace support to help them address the challenges they face on the job. Nearly three-fourths of women surveyed expressed a desire for a less intrusive treatment to a working woman’s lifestyle. Citing convenience and fewer side effects as rationale, 86 percent of women said they would prefer an oral chemotherapy treatment to intravenous administration.

“Because I took an oral chemotherapy pill instead of going to the clinic all the time for IV treatment, I missed fewer days of work and felt more like myself,” said Mertz. “I also didn’t have any hair loss, which helped me to maintain my self-esteem.”

For more about the Cancer and Careers and Managing Through Cancer programs, please visit CEWF’s Cancer and Careers Web site at www.cancerandcareers.org.