

Inspiration From “The Last Lecture”

Barb Henry, APRN-BC, MSN

Randy Pausch, PhD, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA, delivered “The Last Lecture,” an inspirational message on achieving childhood dreams that has become known worldwide for its positive themes and Pausch’s moral authority to deliver it: his bravery, dignity, and humility in the face of terminal pancreatic cancer. On July 25, 2008, Pausch lost his battle against pancreatic cancer. “The brilliant flame may have been snuffed out, but his spirit continues to shine” (Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, 2008, p. 1). In the following excerpts, nurses from across the United States share their feelings about Pausch and “The Last Lecture.” Pausch’s life and work truly touch the hearts of oncology nurses.

I found “The Last Lecture” incredibly inspiring. It was obvious that, even before he was diagnosed, Randy Pausch was a man determined to leave his mark on the world and, when he knew he had so little time, on his children. That he *chose* and was *able* to share his insights into how to successfully live the life you desire and dream of, even while his was slipping away, was further evidence of this drive.

I appreciated the debate between Randy and his wife, Jai, over whether to take so much of his very limited time to give the lecture and write the book. What a difficult decision that must have been for them; one that must have been torturous for her to accept and support. At the end of the book, Randy makes the point that it was all done for his children. What an amazing and precious gift and legacy to leave to children who will not know their dad. I appreciate that he left so much of himself to all of us as well.

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Connecting to people is why I love oncology nursing. Patients like Randy have

much to teach us in that connection. His reflection of his life journey teaches others to connect. I have had many patients in my career in oncology reflect his response to illness in much the same way. Allowing this connection enables mentoring by the patient and inspires one to surmount their road blocks or, as Randy says, the brick walls that are put there for only those who really don’t want to reach their goal. Despite the brick wall of poor prognosis, there is a choice to connect to people and a positive response to illness. I believe Randy, via “The Last Lecture,” will help many families, nurses, and patients to connect in the future.

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“The Last Lecture” inspired me deeply. As an oncology nurse practitioner who has been involved with patients with cancer for more than 25 years, I found Randy Pausch to be the perfect example of the “rule” versus the “exception.” No matter what is going on in my life, I need only go to work to be inspired by the attitude, humor, strength, and perseverance that my patients show me every day. As they

“The Last Lecture” Online

To view Randy Pausch’s “The Last Lecture” and other video messages, visit <http://download.srv.cs.cmu.edu/~pausch>.

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Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/08.CJON.845-846

