

Stuff Happens

Stuff Happens," read the subject line of the second e-mail in my in-box early one morning this past August. The sender was Rose Mary Carroll-Johnson, MN, RN, editor of this journal. I looked at the list of e-mails for a moment and decided I'd better read hers first. I had a manuscript under review with the *Oncology Nursing Forum* (ONF) and immediately thought the "stuff" was that the manuscript was being rejected. That would have been a good thing compared to the news in the e-mail. Rose Mary, a longtime friend and colleague, had been diagnosed with gastric carcinoma.

"How could that be?" was my instantaneous reaction. I was stunned, and as I read the remainder of her e-mail, the news began to really sink in. "She's an oncology nurse!" I said aloud, as though one's profession conferred some type of cancer immunity.

As I reviewed the various articles and columns for this issue, I found that my initial reaction to Rose Mary's news was mirrored in a book reviewed in this issue's Knowledge Central column (see pages 734–735). Laura Liberman, MD, a radiologist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, recently published *I Signed as the Doctor: Memoir of a Cancer Doctor Surviving Cancer* about her experiences after being diagnosed with lymphoma. Liberman remarked, "I must have thought being a doctor, wearing that white coat, confers immunity—like cancer is something that happens to other people, and couldn't possibly happen to me." Not "immunity" but becoming part of a larger "community" has put Rose Mary in the passenger seat in the infusion room.

As oncology nurses, we know that no one is immune to cancer, including our colleagues and family members. Unfortunately, life isn't a reality TV show

where we can confer immunity on ourselves or someone we love! Many of us have been in a visitor chair in a cancer center when family members have faced cancer treatment. Maybe we've even sat, like Rose Mary, in the passenger seat. Cancer affects people in all states of health, in all walks of life, and yes, our oncology nurse colleagues.

No one is immune to cancer, including our oncology nurse colleagues. Sharing the news of cancer among one of us is guaranteed to do one thing: bring out the best in all of us.

Sharing the news of cancer among one of us is guaranteed to do one thing: bring out the best in all of us. Offers of help came pouring across the Internet and phone lines. "What can we do?" "Do you need anything?" And the greatest offer to be made to an oncology nurse, "Do you need a nurse?" Rose Mary walks many paths in her not-so-everyday life: oncology nurse at City of Hope, editor of this journal, and countless other endeavors and initiatives too numerous to list. Our fellow nurses and Oncology Nursing Society publishing colleagues have stepped up to the plate to do more than cook, clean, and provide advice and diversion. They have filled in the gaps in her clinical practice and signed on to help edit ONF manuscripts. Her close—and nearby—friends took on her daily life tasks and provided hands-on care and support for Rose Mary and her family while both struggled with this new role as a cancer family.

My contribution—one for which I am humbly honored—is to walk alongside

Rose Mary in her role as editor, to do the daily editorial tasks necessary to keep this journal running smoothly and fulfill her plan and vision for each issue of ONF. I've had a long association with ONF as a reader, contributor, peer reviewer, and associate editor. Assistant editor is a new role for me, one in which I remain mindful that I am walking this path in tandem with Rose Mary.

On the desk in my home office sits a small calligraphic print with a quote from the Talmud: **Look ahead. You are not expected to complete the task. Neither are you permitted to lay it down.** I have had that print—a gift from a close friend—in one or another of my home workspaces for almost 20 years. For many years, I pondered the full meaning of this Talmudic saying.

If I wasn't expected to complete something, what else would I do but stop and put it aside? Age (sometimes) brings wisdom; I finally figured it out. The task is mine so long as I continue to work at it. When I can no longer move forward, the task isn't mine to just forget and put down. I have to pass it back or pass it on. This is now my task, gratefully and thoughtfully accepted.

Just in case you think I'm winging it in this new role, know that Rose Mary—the best mentor I know—has carefully planned each ONF issue from now through May 2010, and probably has a few more issues past that planned in her head. The good news is that, as this issue goes to press, Rose Mary is moving forward with chemotherapy. We wish her well.

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Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/09.ONF.611