BOOK REVIEW

After You Ring the Bell ... 10 Challenges for the Cancer Survivor

The following is a review of After You Ring the Bell ... 10 Challenges for the Cancer Survivor by Anne Katz. Dr. Anne Katz is a well-known Canadian author of several poignant books for patients, including topics on cancer and sexuality. After You Ring the Bell is her most recent publication. The author focused on a wide variety of issues that patients face after surviving cancer. The target audience is patients. However, health care professionals would find the book informative and valuable to read. The book is easy to read, well organized, and written clearly.

The title, After You Ring the Bell, refers to bells that several cancer centres have for patients to ring after they have finished their treatment. While it is a significant moment for the patient, the ending of their treatment and the beginning of a new chapter in their lives, frequently patients face the question, “What now?” This book helps put the “what now” into perspective. It touches on the 10 most common challenges encountered by cancer survivors including health worries, depression, fatigue, nutrition, and other long-term effects of cancer treatments.

The title of each chapter identifies a specific survivorship topic, but also provides a personal feel to the subject matter. Each chapter includes a plethora of practical tips, not just clinical information. Topic titles in each chapter assist with understanding the normalcy of specific feelings and issues including ‘sometimes a cough is just a cough’; ‘battling the blues’; ‘walking through mud’; ‘moving right along’; ‘on high alert’; ‘protection for life’; ‘in a fog’; ‘being a part of it all’; ‘up close and personal’; and ‘empty nests’. In addition, unfolding case studies clearly illustrate the issues and put a human touch on them. The case studies address a variety of issues and patients, including pediatric survivors and the unique issues they face.

Separate sections exist within each chapter, which discuss relevant statistics for each issue. For example, ‘battling the blues’ starts out with statistics on depression in cancer survivors. While these stats can almost read clinically, this is tempered by the following section, which describes depression clearly for a non-health professional. The layout of the book is concise with smooth transitions between chapters, although the section on depression, or “the blues”, could have been the second chapter, the first of the challenges. Many cancer survivors experience depression and do not feel this is a normal experience. This chapter not only normalizes these feelings for patients, it also assists them in identifying and intervening. In addition, potential feelings of resentment and guilt in spouses of cancer survivors are addressed.

Not only is this book informational, it is empowering for patients. For example, patients can learn strategies for dealing with busy physicians. They can ensure that all their questions are answered by a busy physician who appears to have limited time to respond to questions in chapter three. Tips for patients are provided along with a reminder they have the right to have their questions answered. The final pages of the book include resources for patients to access with any further issues or questions they may have.

In summary, this book is an excellent resource for cancer survivors. The author addressed many common issues patients may experience after completing their cancer treatments and becoming a cancer survivor. Often, patients expect life to go back to normal after treatment, and this book assists them to understand that they may be required to find their new normal. It is also an excellent resource for health care professionals providing valuable information on cancer survivorship and interventions for supporting the needs of cancer survivors.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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