
THE TOTAL PATIENT



Building special memories with their loved ones may be the best medicine

Bette Weinstein Kaplan

Sometimes the best thing you can do for your patient with cancer is to tell her or him to go away ... on a vacation, that is. Patients should be encouraged to take advantage of the vacation and day trip offers available for people with cancer from various organizations. These programs accomplish amazing things for the patients and families they help. Although there are quite a few of these organizations across the country, this column will focus on two of them.

FROM DINNER TO A VACATION

The Karen Wellington Foundation for LIVING with Breast Cancer This foundation began in 2007 in honor and memory of Karen Wellington, whose breast cancer was diagnosed at age 30 years.¹ The mother of two young children, she chose to spend her last years living life to the fullest, and enjoyed another unexpected 10 years with her family, often in vacation homes donated by their friends. After her death in 2007, Wellington's family and friends established the foundation to carry on her legacy and honor other women and families living with breast cancer.¹

The foundation assures that patients with breast cancer go on vacations, relax at a day spa, and enjoy meals or nights out on the town. The philosophy of the Karen Wellington Foundation is they know there is a cure out there

somewhere; but in the meantime, the foundation gives women something fun to which they can look forward. That is no easy accomplishment, since patients often have calendars filled with doctors' appointments, chemotherapy treatments, and surgeries. The work of the Karen Wellington Foundation for LIVING with Breast Cancer is in the name; it strives to remind patients and their families that taking time to really appreciate *living* is important.¹

This program offers hope and relaxation for patients whose lives are consumed with battling their disease. The goal is to get women with breast cancer back on their feet and reconnected with their families so they can

The goal is to get women with breast cancer reconnected with their families.

go ahead and live life to the fullest, as Karen Wellington did. Patients with breast cancer can be nominated for a vacation or day-spa package via the form on the foundation's Web site by friends or relatives. The foundation accepts donations of vacation homes, condominiums, and time shares that

can be offered to breast cancer patients. They also ask salon owners to donate their business' services so patients can enjoy manicures, pedicures, massages, or a full day of spa treatments when a long vacation stay is not practical. Once the donation is made, the Karen Wellington Foundation coordinates all the arrangements for a deserving patient with breast cancer and her family.

TREATING FAMILIES, NOT CANCER

The Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation (JAJF) Another brave woman's fight with terminal breast cancer led her and her husband to found the JAJF prior to her death.

The family unit is the heart of the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation. Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the organization helps families across the country escape their stressful days and heartache while creating lasting memories through vacations and other shared experiences, which they call *WOW! experiences*.² These shared family times might be much-needed vacations, tickets to sporting events and musical performances, VIP tours, privileged guest appearances, even meeting celebrities.

WOW! Programs have sent families on behind-the-scenes tours and visits at recording studios or live movie sets. Families have spent time with CEOs, mayors, and governors; enjoyed picnic

JAJF provides the family a chance to spend quality time together.

outings in classic cars, cruises on private yachts, and rides on private planes. The families have stayed at dude ranches and elegant resorts, enjoyed going to concerts, the Grammys, the Oscars, American Idol, and the X-Games. They have attended professional and college sports games, and enjoyed cruises, theme parks, and attractions. The families have even had private tours of the White House. Throughout their special times, the families are treated like the VIPs the Jack & Jill Foundation believes they are.²

This organization is attentive to the whole family, especially those families with children younger than 18 years whose parent has a late-stage cancer

and a limited life expectancy. Even though the children are not the ones afflicted, their worlds are filled with stress and turmoil because of their parent's disease. These children are coping with the knowledge that their lives will never be the same. Thus, JAJF provides the whole family a chance to spend quality time together in the face of these uncertainties and hardships. To be eligible, all candidates must

- Be referred directly by their treating oncologist;
- Have late-stage, limited life expectancy cancer;
- Have a life expectancy of more than 2 months;
- Have at least one child between age 3 and 18 years;
- Have not participated in any other adult dream, wish, or similar program.

A coalition of 191 oncology hospitals and centers in 44 states refer eligible patients to the JAJF program, which only accepts referrals from oncologists. Based

on the criteria established by the JAJF's medical advisors, eligible patients are offered the chance to become recipients of their WOW! program. Oncologists give their blessings to the families by prescribing the program as part of the patient's treatment protocol.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Many other wish-granting organizations for children with cancer as well as other programs for adult patients offer similar services. We will feature them in future columns, and welcome recommendations from readers. ■

Bette Weinstein Kaplan is a medical writer based in Tenafly, New Jersey.

REFERENCES

1. The Karen Wellington Foundation for LIVING With Breast Cancer. <http://www.kwellington-foundation.org>. Accessed January 28, 2013.
2. The Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation. <http://www.jajf.org>. Accessed January 28, 2013.