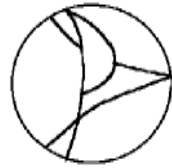


Community Matters



Local Cancer Patients Need Your Help

By: Patricia A. O'Malley

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Hundreds of area cancer patients receive medical treatments in local hospitals each week. Unfortunately, some of them have to skip their treatments because they can't get to the hospitals. Some don't have their own cars, are too ill to drive themselves, or can't afford to pay for repeated trips and parking. Some have no family in the area, or their family members aren't available on weekdays. It's hard enough to deal with cancer, without worrying about transportation on top of it.

In the 1960s and 70s, American Cancer Society volunteers began an informal program to provide transportation to patients. Volunteers in Massachusetts implemented a systematic approach to the problem in the early 1980s. In 1983, the American Cancer Society started its national Road to Recovery program, in which volunteers drive patients to and from their appointments.

The Society's local office participates in the program. There are 30 drivers in Allegheny County, but only three in the South Hills. They receive about four to eight requests for volunteer transportation each month in the South Hills area alone. They can't fill all of the requests because they don't have enough volunteer drivers.

They particularly need help in Jefferson Borough, Pleasant Hills, Baldwin Borough, Whitehall, Brentwood, Elizabeth, and South Park Township. Diane Buchner White, the Senior Community Cancer Control Specialist for the Greater Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Cancer Society, says they need at least five additional volunteers. "The more drivers we have, the more people we can serve," she says.

Drivers spend about one or two hours per week, but can offer more time. The arrangements are very flexible. The volunteers can choose how much time they want to give, and when and where they would like to drive. Patients and drivers often become friends.

Volunteer drivers must have a valid Pennsylvania driver's license, their own vehicle, and valid proof of car insurance. The American Cancer Society provides training and support.

Last month, on Martin Luther King Day, President Obama called on all Americans to join in a national day of service. There was a wonderful outpouring of help for those in need. The day is over, but the needs continue. Can you imagine anything more frustrating than knowing that the medical care to save your life is only a few miles away, but that you can't get there?

We have all benefitted from the efforts of volunteers at one time or another. Susan Ellis is the President of Energize, Inc., an international training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. Ellis says, "Consider that most people find themselves in need at some point in their lives. So today, you may be the person with the ability to help, but tomorrow you may be the recipient of someone else's volunteer effort. Even now you might be on both sides of the service cycle: maybe you are a tutor for someone who can't read, while last month the volunteer ambulance corps rushed you to the emergency room. Volunteering also includes "self-help." So if you are active in your neighborhood

crime watch, your home is protected while you protect your neighbors' homes, too. Adding your effort to the work of others makes everyone's lives better."

At some time, volunteers have been there when you needed them. This is one opportunity to give back to your community. If you've never done anything like this before, don't worry. The American Cancer Society will help you. Take a chance. Step outside your usual life. Stretch a little. Try it for a month. You can do that. And you won't regret it.

If you're willing and able to help, please contact Diane Buchner White at the Greater Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Cancer Society. The information is listed below.

If you're interested in volunteering but this isn't your cup of tea, you can look at the other Web sites listed.

For more information, contact:

Diane Buchner White
Senior Community Cancer Control Specialist
American Cancer Society, Greater Pittsburgh Chapter
320 Bilmar Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15205
Phone: 412 919-1100
www.cancer.org.

For other volunteer opportunities, go to: www.volunteermatch.org, www.pittsburghcares.org,
www.unitedwaypittsburgh.org.

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