

Compassion Story of the Month

Treating Cancer with Compassion

By a Friend of BMH Oncology

As you enter the top floor of the Richards Building at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, you see patients making their way into the Oncology department. Their stories vary greatly, but, for most, their gait is anything but buoyant.

Agnes Mikijanec, ARNP, and her fellow department staff members well understand what a cancer diagnosis can mean for a patient. It can mean fear, anxiety, and shock. It can throw patients into the throes of indescribable emotional torment. When is the need greater for providers to be able to form bonds and provide respite, comfort and, where possible, reassurance to patients who are at these moments so excruciatingly vulnerable? And when is the need greater for Brattleboro to show its mettle as a new participant in the international Charter for Compassion?

Agnes understands this torment well – and understands innately that every person, every situation is unique. For over 13 years, working alongside a highly experienced team of physicians, a clinical nurse specialist, and several oncology nurses, she has witnessed patients and their families undergo the heartbreak, but also, increasingly, the relief that follows a cancer diagnosis.

For decades now, BMH oncology and support services have grown and adapted to serve the changing needs of the community, as they are entrusted with the daunting responsibility of providing care for their friends, neighbors and community.

And for over thirteen years, Agnes Mikijanec has been doing just that, and, in the process, has earned the trust and the respect of everyone she serves. “Agnes is a gift,” says one of her former patients. “She responded to every one of my visits and calls as if I were her only responsibility.”

Providing to patients, and particularly patients wrestling with cancer, the best available clinical care clearly involves not only identifying the right therapies and treatments, but also providing this kind of unwavering emotional support. Former patient Betty Wellman, marvels at the support she received from Agnes, and the boundless encouragement and comfort Agnes provided:

“She took such wonderful care of me. She made me smile. She educated me about my illness in a way I could really understand. I called her so often, and she treated me as if I were her dearest friend. We all could tell that she truly loves her job. Thanks to her and her colleagues in the Department, I always felt comfortable and secure, confident that I was getting the best - and the most compassionate care that exists anywhere.”

Ensuring that patients receive accurate and timely information relating to their condition and treatment is crucial for Agnes, as noted by patient Claire Lavender:

“She has been such a comfort to all of us. Agnes makes you feel like she is your friend. Her empathy and kindness go beyond words. She is *always* approachable and appears tireless when getting answers to our endless questions and while determining the best treatment for each of us. She truly is a credit not only to BMH, but to her profession as a whole.”

A cancer diagnosis may be the most fearful experience patients and their loved ones will ever face. But knowing they have a team of such compassionate caregivers standing with them, gives them the strength and resolve to fight the battle – or, where necessary, to accept the verdict. Clinicians like Agnes Mikijanec make this possible.

With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a “Compassion Story of the Month.” This is the fifth.

Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: compassionstory@gmail.com or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.