In life, meeting someone who truly possesses the gift of teaching is a blessing. As an exceptional mentor and role model, this person will inspire us to be the best that we can be and make us want to be better human beings. As oncology nurses, we have the honor of caring for patients who have been devastated by the diagnosis of cancer. Establishing deep connections with some of these patients will enrich and give more meaning to our own lives.

AT A GLANCE

- A holistic approach is integral in helping to focus the mind so that patients with cancer can have better control of their emotional state, thereby improving their physical health.
- Healthcare professionals must develop the skill of active listening with empathy when engaging with their patients; this helps validate patients’ emotions and perceptions during their cancer diagnosis and treatment and at the end of life.
- A cancer diagnosis triggers a wide range of emotions, and, oftentimes, they all can occur simultaneously.

Lifelong Impression

Remembering one of our own during the holiday season

Mai-Fung Ho-Law, MSN, RN, OCN®

Each upcoming winter poses the laborious task of decorating the house for the holiday season. It starts with lugging all the boxes filled with decorations from the basement to the first floor and ends with the joyful reward of a feast for one’s eyes after transforming the house into a winter wonderland.

One decoration of mine that is packed and unpacked with exceptional care is a beautiful porcelain snowman music box. This music box is one of my most treasured gifts because it was given to me by a patient I took care of more than 20 years ago. Each time I look at this special gift during the holiday season, I feel a sensation of warmth in my heart. It always triggers a flood of memories as I take a moment to remember a patient that left a lasting impression on me, personally and professionally.

As a brand new graduate, completely naïve, I was so excited and anxious to embark on my professional journey. I remember as clear as day walking through the front door of a prestigious hospital to begin my nursing career.

After completing all the required general orientation classes, I met one nursing instructor, Pat, who made an indelible impression. Pat always had the most comprehensible explanations and the ability to connect and easily engage with people. She made learning fun and kept us interested every day. She possessed the quality of being able to effect bonding experiences between herself and the orientees. Because of Pat’s teaching ability, this created a positive learning experience and provided me with confidence. This instructor was committed to the nursing profession. I looked up to her for her endless patience, kindness, and support. I saw Pat as a role model for a nursing educator I’d like to become one day. Four years later, I became an oncology nurse.

One summer morning when I came into work, I was in shock. I looked at the list of patients scheduled for that day. I saw Pat’s name and thought, “Please don’t let this be her. Please let it be someone else with the same name.” Unfortunately, it was her, and she had been diagnosed with stage IV ovarian cancer. She was on leave from work to get cancer treatment. I was so upset for her and nervous to take care of my mentor as a patient, which is different from how I had felt before taking care of other patients. It felt so unfair that Pat was sitting in that treatment chair. Somehow, she put me at ease knowing it was difficult for me to be her nurse. Eventually, I relaxed and performed the patient education that was needed for a first-time patient receiving chemotherapy. I had received the privilege of taking care of my instructor. In an odd way, I felt I was giving back for all the kindness and support she had given me.

Pat was normally robust in size, active, had tremendous mental and spiritual strength, and possessed a true presence that you could still feel even after she left the room. She was not about to let a thing like cancer drag her down. Pat...