

Nothing in the World Will Ever Be the Same

As I sat to write this editorial, I already had decided that berating a tobacco company for its most recent bit of outrageousness would have to wait. It seemed inappropriate not to acknowledge what this country has been through in the past few weeks. A refrain (“Nothing in the world will ever be the same.”) from a song I could not quite remember kept distracting me. The rest of the words eluded me.

As we sat in front of our televisions that September morning and numbly watched the tragedy unfold, literally in front of our eyes, the stories began to emerge. A nurse at a nearby cancer center was in e-mail contact with her husband at work in the World Trade Center when suddenly the line went dead. An ONS member’s husband was the co-pilot on the plane that went down in Pennsylvania. The brother of one of the *Oncology Nursing Forum’s* associate editors was working at the Pentagon but blessedly escaped injury. None of us have been left untouched by what happened, and our oncology family, no stranger to death, is reeling also.

For hate to be so strong that it becomes palpable and so destructive is foreign to all

of us. At times like this, we search for a way to grasp some measure of understanding. I decided early on that the mentality that fomented these actions was essentially beyond our understanding. You see, we try to figure it out based on our values, thought processes, and culture, none of which is shared by those who committed these crimes. I did, however, find some perspective in what was familiar to me—fighting cancer. Oncology nurses understand better than most the quiet killing process that begins with a few errant cells that somehow are protected or evade detection. Their destructive power grows and spreads until, at some out-of-the-blue moment, their existence becomes startlingly apparent. We also know that to be effective, cancer treatment must be sure, swift, and, most importantly, systemic. Cancer is not a local problem, and this violence we have witnessed is surely a cancer of our human condition. The treatment and the cure must be aggressive, multimodal, and continuing. Persistence, perseverance, and a commitment to prevention and detection will be the hallmarks of the war on this particularly malicious form of cancer.

Also at this time, I am reminded of how we commonly hear our patients say that they have emerged better for the experience—more in touch with the gift of each day of life, with a better ability to prioritize what is most important, and with a new appreciation of what it means to **cope**. America is discovering some of these things now and will be stronger by virtue of what we have experienced. We grieve, but we will not be undone.

Gradually, the rest of the song comes to me. Ironically, the name of the song is “Love Changes Everything” by Andrew Lloyd Weber. Love and hate are two very powerful emotions, and both can and do change everything. A favorite author of mine, Tom Robbins, once wrote in one of his novels, “How do you make love stay?” By book’s end, the answer remained elusive, but Robbins wrote, “Everything is a part of it.” I cannot help but think that even as we take action to fight this terrible war on terrorism and violence that our ability to love and care will keep us human and bring us the success that surely will be ours. God bless us all. 