

Shared Inspiration

Keeping the Faith

Elizabeth Martinez, RN, BSN, OCN®

During the holiday season of 2007, I received a gift from my mom's dearest friend, a "faith bracelet" that she made by hand (see Figure 1). This bracelet had multiple colored beads, with each bead having a special meaning. The red colored beads represented the blood Jesus shed for us, green was for new life in Jesus, blue for baptism, white for purity, black for our sins, purple for the crown of life, and yellow signified God's perfect light. The gift was very thoughtful, but, to me, it simply was a pretty piece of jewelry. At least that is what I thought at the time. I put it on my wrist and wore it to work.

While making my rounds on the inpatient oncology unit, one of my patients was very tearful. She began to tell me that she found out that she was terminal and there was nothing else that could be done for her. She then added that it was her birthday. I took the faith bracelet from my wrist and slipped it onto hers. I told her what it was. I explained that it was meant to be a reminder of her own faith and inner strength which would help guide her through this difficult time. Her tears changed instantly into a smile.

After giving away my gift, I called my mom's friend and asked if I could buy another bracelet. A woman was admitted to our unit a few weeks later with brain metastasis, and I gave her my second bracelet with the same story but added that, if she no longer needed her bracelet, she should pass it along to someone else who did.

Beauty Unfolds

Some time passed before I saw my two faith bracelet patients again. The first patient began having frequent admissions toward the end of her journey with cancer, but each time she saw me, she made it a point to show me that she

was still wearing her bracelet and she was smiling when she showed me. The bracelet gave her a positive focus during a very difficult time.

The second patient was admitted to our inpatient hospice. When I went in to visit her and the family, her sister was sitting by her side. The sister immediately held up her wrist to show me that she was now wearing the bracelet. She told me that, as she was being rolled away on the stretcher to have brain surgery, her sister told her that she could use the bracelet more and passed the bracelet to her with the reminder of faith. As heart-breaking and sincere as this story is, she also was wearing a smile on her face. I was beginning to see the magic unfolding and that these were no ordinary pieces of jewelry.

After taking care of these amazing patients and their loved ones, I shared these experiences with my nurse manager. Together we presented the Faith Bracelet Initiative to the staff, which has generously donated their own funds to support this initiative so that all patients are now given a faith bracelet as their cancer chemotherapy journey begins. The bracelet reminds patients of their own faith and assists them with coping during some of the challenges that may be encountered during treatment. The bracelet also can be given to a hospice patient or significant other who is having a difficult time coping or anyone who is simply having an overwhelming moment. Staff members also have given the bracelet to coworkers or friends who are going through a difficult time.

Art of Oncology Nursing

The oncology staff has been asked many times, "Isn't your job depressing?" Sure, it has some sad moments, but the rewards are empowering. Our unit joins forces on a daily basis to better the lives of our patients and their loved ones.



Figure 1. Faith Bracelet

Note. Photograph courtesy of Elizabeth Martinez. Used with permission.

The oncology team is always looking for ways to go above and beyond in meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of our patients. Our patients have taught us about not taking a moment for granted. The Faith Bracelet Initiative has helped change their fears into faith, their hopelessness into strength, and their tears into smiles. The positive response is seen not only in the recipient of the bracelet but also in the person giving it. The power of kindness came straight from the heart of the nursing staff and went directly to the hearts of our patients and their loved ones, which has positively enhanced the healing process.

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Survivor's Blessings

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I was 21 years old and in my final semester of nursing school at the University of Oklahoma, rounding with the oncology nurse at the Veterans Affairs