A good friend of mine died recently after a sudden and brief illness. One of the things that helped those of us who cared for and about her was the use of the social networking Web site, LotsaHelpingHands (www.lotsahelpinghands.com). The site enabled us to provide updates to her family and friends near and far, receive messages from them, coordinate her care, and help the family with food and child care. It also saved the family from being bombarded by well-wishers and people who wanted to help in some way during their time of acute crisis. It was amazing how quickly word spread. Within a day of the site going live, more than 150 people across the United States had signed up and all of the requests for help over the month were spoken for.

When my friend was in the hospital, I showed her Web site to one of her nurses. The nurse was not aware of these free Web-based communities and said they would be especially helpful for patients with large or extended families. The Web site also gave the nurse a greater sense of who my friend was and all the friends and family supporting her from afar. I have participated in similar Web sites that help me keep in touch without burdening my friends (the patients) or their families. Have you heard of them or used them? Have your patients?

Social networking sites allow users to communicate—regardless of location and time of day. Many people want to help. I encourage nurses to learn more about social networking Web sites and make sure that patients and their families know about them, too. Doing so will facilitate the support that is so necessary when facing cancer. For my friend and her family and friends, www.lotsahelpinghands.com was an amazing resource that kept us connected during a very difficult time.

The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the author or editorial staff.

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