

CONNECTING PATIENTS & RESOURCES



A cancer diagnosis brings about a whirlwind of emotions and decision-making directly related to the disease.

Later, other concerns begin to surface: Who can take care of my child when I go for treatment? How will I make my mortgage payment when our finances are so stretched? How will I get to and from my treatments? That's where Chris Strand, a social worker dedicated to oncology at Mercy Regional Cancer Center, comes in.

Every person who receives treatment at Hall Radiation Center has the opportunity to meet with Chris, whose services are entirely funded by Mercy as an outreach benefit to patients. As part of Mercy's focus on treating the whole person, the cancer center also offers massage

therapy, nutritional counseling with a dietitian and the services of a financial resource advocate.

"The goal is for me to see all the patients at least once to check in with them to see how they are doing and if they need any assistance," says Chris. Patients experiencing a higher level of distress may have additional visits with Chris.

"People initially get nervous about what a social worker does. The role is often misunderstood. I am a resource to help connect patients and families to the services they need to address their psycho-social needs, which vary according to individual situations," explains Chris. "I am also a person to talk to about how

they are feeling, coping, and offer support and suggestions based on their particular situation. The issues and needs I address with patients and families are not always related to cancer."

Ron Earnest is a Hall Radiation Center patient who really appreciated having Chris to talk to. In fact, he says her job really should be called "the patient's friend." Ron met Chris after his diagnosis of nasopharyngeal carcinoma, or cancer in the area behind his nose and above the back of his throat.



"Chris guided me to someone who could guide me through the insurance system – she told me where to go to get extra help and services, and set me up with a financial planner," Ron says. "And, she helped me out personally as far as making sure I took care of myself."

The single father of a 14-year-old boy, Ron's greatest concerns centered around his son's well-being. Chris helped assuage those by arranging a tour for his son at Hall Radiation Center. "He got to see how the Tomotherapy machine worked and the nurses took the time to explain to him what they were doing to me," says Ron. "He could ask questions and get answers."

"Having her help him understand what I was going through was big because I was so scared about him going to school and worrying about me," Ron says, proudly adding that his son is excelling at school. "He grew up and you can't put a price on that. I think Chris' help made it easier for him to go ahead and do well in school."

Ron's treatments ended in early September 2010—but for Chris, the caring doesn't end with treatments, and she continues to check in on Ron periodically.

A former Hall Radiation Center patient, Ron Earnest checks in with Chris Strand, a social worker dedicated to oncology.