

MY DAD HAS CANCER

Sixth-grader Codie Lyman enjoys sports, hanging out with her friends and spending time on her phone.

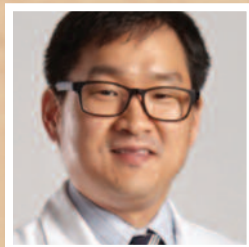




Vincent Reid, MD
Oncologic Surgeon
Hall-Perrine Cancer Center



Jasmine Nabi, MD
Medical Oncologist
Hall-Perrine Cancer Center



Wook Lee, MD
Radiation Oncologist
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But, unlike most other kids her age, she's dealing with the emotional impact of having a father with cancer.

Codie, 11, says she was scared and nervous when her dad, Chris Lyman, told her he had cancer. She didn't know what it meant for him or how it would affect her and her family. And, she didn't really know how to express her feelings about it.

Chris, 41, has Stage 3c rectal cancer and is being treated with both radiation and chemotherapy at Mercy's Hall-Perrine Cancer Center. Fellowship-trained oncologic surgeon Vincent Reid, MD, performed an intricate surgery to remove the cancer. Chris is receiving follow-up care and chemotherapy from medical oncologist Jasmine Nabi, MD, and radiation treatment from radiation oncologist Wook Lee, MD.

Mercy's cancer center offers a full spectrum of care for patients and their families, including access to Certified Child Life Specialist Brenda Gordley, BS, RN. Codie has been meeting with Brenda once a week for the last several months to help her process and talk about her feelings, as well as have a better understanding of what her father is going through.

Brenda's role is an extension of Hall-Perrine Cancer Center's Family Resource Center, a comprehensive resource center for individuals affected by a cancer diagnosis, with a primary focus on spouses, children, parents, friends, caregivers and support persons. The center also serves the larger community as a hub for educational resources and support services.

ADVICE TO PARENTS:

- Be straightforward in letting the child know about the diagnosis.
- Share information, but let kids give you cues as to what's too much and what they want to know. (Watch for eye contact, fidgeting, acting distracted, etc.)
- Ask them how much they want to know about what's going on. Kids are able to monitor for themselves what they need to know if we pay attention as adults. Identify when they are ready to hear about it.

"When the social worker at the cancer center told Chris we had this service available, he said he wanted to do whatever he could to support Codie," says Brenda. "Having a parent with cancer was affecting how she was interacting with friends. She was becoming more introspective and her friends didn't perceive it correctly."

Codie says when she is preoccupied with her dad's cancer, she becomes quiet and her friends sometimes call her "grouchy." Brenda helps her with communication skills, including: speaking respectfully and not voicing frustration; maintaining eye contact; listening to what the other person is saying; and communicating in person, rather than by text or Facebook messages.

"When you are 11, your friends are important to you and your peer interactions are at the core of those relationships. I have been helping her with adjusting in her friend group as she goes through the different emotions of having her dad have cancer and go through treatment," explains Brenda.

"I typically use a lot of art and games to break the ice and as a way to communicate. As we go through an activity, a conversation will naturally begin. When the conversation lulls, we can go back to the game or activity."

Codie says, "At first I didn't think I would like to do this (meet with Brenda). But then I figured out it was helping me. I like how we do activities when we talk. And, I like that what we say doesn't go outside the room." Codie also attended the

"The sessions have made our family closer and issues easier to accept and overcome."

*Chris Lyman
Cancer Patient
Hall-Perrine Cancer Center*



CERTIFIED CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST BRENDA GORDLEY, BS, RN, STRINGS BEADS WITH CODIE LYMAN, 11, AS A WAY TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATIONS DURING THEIR SESSIONS AT HALL-PERRINE CANCER CENTER.

cancer center's support group, Together We Care, led by Brenda and social worker Missy Keen, for children affected by cancer.

"The sessions have made our family closer and issues easier to accept and overcome," says Chris. "It would be very difficult for one to go through this fight alone, without family and the support from special programs like this."

Brenda customizes individual sessions to the age of the child. Often she acts as a resource for parents who have questions about what to say to their children about a specific situation, such as how to explain hair loss to a 3-year-old.

"Younger kids are most concerned about things that change their routines, such as who

will take care of them or who will tuck them in at night. They are at a more egocentric age. The goal is to create as much consistency as possible. That seems to be the biggest thing—and letting kids know what to expect if there is a change in their routine," says Brenda.

"Older kids are more concerned about peer relationships. They also are concerned about changes to their routine, but have a better understanding that a parent is tired and not feeling up to going places," she adds.

Chris is grateful Brenda's services are available. Her sessions have had positive results at home, making it easier to communicate about something that often isn't easy to talk about.

RED FLAGS FOR PARENTS TO WATCH FOR:

- Changes in sleeping patterns.
- Changes in school work.
- Changes in groups of friends.
- Changes in appetite — over- or under-eating.
- Behavioral extremes that are a change, such as increased anxiety or being totally withdrawn.
- Going backward in developmental milestones, like potty-training. Kids may start wetting the bed or their pants or revert back to sucking their thumb. That's because they are going back to a place in time when they were more comfortable and had more mastery of their situation.

Learn more about Mercy's cancer services at www.hallperrinecancercenter.org.