

Columbus Cancer Care Foundation

By Dr. Joan Keit

The Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation supports local cancer patients and their care-givers during their cancer journey. It is a unique cancer society, in that all funds raised stay in Columbus and the surrounding communities. The Foundation provides free transportation services, gas cards, community education, a cancer resource room, cancer support group, and other services.

The Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation is a 501(c)3 public charity. Founded by Columbus Radiation Oncologist, Dr. Joan Keit, it is led by a Board of Directors and managed by a committee of 15 community members. All are volunteers.

A dedicated PATIENT VAN provides transportation for people to get to cancer treatment appointments in Columbus. In the 2016, the CCCF van has provided 307 round trips for cancer patients to get to Radiation, Chemotherapy, Surgery, Wound Care, and Doctor Office appointments. Many people served are from Columbus, and others have been from communities of Nance, Boone, Butler, Polk, and Colfax Counties. For those receiving specialized care that is not offered in Platte County, the van has also taken patients to Omaha. Transportation is always free for patients.

A major goal is to help provide access to cancer care for our community. "We've seen that a major barrier to cancer care is lack of transportation," says Dr. Keit. "Many patients cannot drive due to effects of cancer, or from side effects from treatment." Some patients miss treatment appointments or do not get treated at all because they have no one available to take them to the doctor. "About half the cancer care given in Columbus is to people who live in the surrounding smaller communities, where transportation assistance is quite limited. The CCCF is working to fill that void, helping with transportation costs and even providing rides."

"In the last Community Health Needs Assessments conducted in our area, the public's number one health concern was cancer, and a priority goal was improvement of Access to Care by developing medical transportation resources for cancer patients," says Theresa Hilton, Director of Patient & Outreach Services at Columbus Community Hospital. Mrs. Hilton is also a member of the Board of Directors of CCCF. "At the hospital, I encounter this critical need from families on a weekly basis and am excited the Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation has developed medical transportation



service to remove this barrier for patients to receive the life sustaining care they need."

GAS CARDS are available for patients who travel more than 30 miles to get cancer care in Platte County. Gas cards are

also available for patients getting treated outside Platte County if they receive services not offered here. In 2016, people families received gas cards. Through an arrangement with Days Inn, free motel room can be available to patients in need.

CCCF works to better the health of our community through cancer awareness, education, and screening. They participate in cancer screenings, and give several talks each year on screening and early detection. There are also programs for children on healthy habits and avoiding tobacco and alcohol.

The Patient Resource Room, located at Columbus Cancer Center, offers free wigs, hats, scarves, educational materials, and some mastectomy supplies. Their major annual fundraiser, "The Blue Jean Benefit," is held in September. The 2016 benefit raised money to fund the Patient Resource Room. A special wig auction provided funds so that women who have lost their hair from cancer treatment can now receive custom ordered high quality wigs for no cost.



COLUMBUS CANCER CARE SUPPORT GROUP is the only cancer support group in Platte County. It is open to any cancer patient, survivor, caregiver, and is free. The group offers support and education, and meets at Columbus Cancer Care 3764 39th Avenue, on the first Tuesday of every month at 5 pm.

THE CANCER BUDDY PROGRAM, new for 2017, matches newly diagnosed patients with a survivor who has been through a similar diagnosis and treatment course. Lynn Vollbracht, a 5 year breast cancer survivor, volunteers for the program, and had this to say: "Going through the journey of a cancer diagnosis is not an easy one for anyone. One of the things that I felt particularly helpful as I went through treatment was the support that I received from others who had also been through a diagnosis and treatment. Knowing that there were others who've been there and getting advice or just a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen was a true blessing. Having been given the gift of restored health since my diagnosis in 2012, I hope that I can reach out through this new program to others who are currently in treatment. I am excited that the Cancer Buddy program will now give me the chance to be that ear, shoulder or cheerleader for someone else!"

Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation is special because it keeps all resources in our local communities. Another unique aspect of Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation is that it is 100% volunteer run. The only paid members are the wonderful van drivers. Also unique, is the CCCF commitment to transparency. Attached is chart showing the distribution of funds for 2016, showing the most money goes straight back into programs.

Donations are accepted all year, and are tax deductible as allowed by law. Donors have the option to specify if they want their contribution to go to a specific program. "I was given a gas card when I was short on funds and couldn't afford to make it to treatment," said Barb C from Stromsburg, Polk County. She expresses her gratitude to the foundation and those who donate, "One day it might be someone you know or love." •