

# THE ROLE OF THE CANCER ASSOCIATION AND THE FAMILY PRACTITIONER

by Frayne Furniss

*The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) plays an important role at various levels of care: health promotion; secondary prevention; palliative care; and supportive services. Although not directly involved in a curative role, CANSA works closely with oncology services to help provide support for cancer patients receiving treatment. CANSA also helps fund research initiatives such as the National Cancer Registry.*

CANSA IS THE ONLY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION in South Africa with the mission of fighting cancer and its consequences. It is a national organisation with six regions serving all nine provinces supported by 34 area offices. Trained volunteers working with the professional staff extend this support service to many towns and villages throughout South Africa. CANSA has recently embarked on a strategic developmental phase which will make its services even more accessible to people with cancer.

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FROM DIAGNOSIS THROUGH ALL STAGES OF CANCER, CANSA provides a service. This may be a need for information about cancer and the toll free line (0800 226622) is the link in the international network of up-to-date information. This information service accesses international on-line medical data bases, cancer related researchers and peer groups. Articles from the latest cancer journals and books are available on request to practitioners or the public at 30 cents per photostated page. Journals and booklets can be ordered from CANSA.

A diagnosis of cancer significantly disrupts the lives of patients and their families. CANSA provides a range of support programmes and ser-

vices to minimise suffering, provide some relief and develop coping abilities. In addition the programme identifies physical, social, psychological, rehabilitation, financial, legal, religious and other resources within the community. This comes in the form of counselling, patient and family education, support groups, day care centres, support for home-based care, transport and interim homes.

CANSA has eight interim homes which accommodate ambulant patients, usually for 6-8 weeks while receiving treatment at an oncology centre as an outpatient. During this period patients from outlying areas stay in a homely atmosphere with people who understand how they feel. They are transported daily to the oncology centre for treatment.

## THE 'I CAN COPE' PROGRAMME

THIS PROGRAMME GIVES PATIENTS AND FAMILIES AN opportunity to learn about cancer, treatment, side-effects of treatment, psychosocial aspects of how to cope with them, diet, and stress relief. In addition the programme identifies and uses physical, social, psychological, rehabilitation, financial, legal, religious and other resources within the community. It is run by professional counselors with medical practitioners, CANSA nurses

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

and dietitians. In this and similar programmes, people learn about cancer and, in meeting other people with similar concerns, bond in their adversity, learn about themselves and grow together. Many cancer patients join a group or receive the support of 'Reach for Recovery' visitors and then later become volunteers in these self-help groups for people with cancer. Patient education is a key factor in assisting people to develop realistic expectations and attitudes in adjusting to changes while living with cancer.

### LOAN SERVICE

**W**IGS FOR PATIENTS WITH ALOPECIA, WHEELCHAIRS, equipment for home care and devices such as syringe-drivers are available from CANSA major centres. Patients or family members contact CANSA or are referred by doctors, hospitals and other agencies for assistance or advice.

WHAT CANSA CANNOT DO IS PROVIDE A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR SERVICE OR FULLTIME NURSING CARE

CANSA patient services work with specialists and general practitioners. Valuable relationships are established where CANSA registered nurses and social workers become part of the multidisciplinary team. Often the general practitioner is the anchor, particularly in small towns and rural areas. CANSA nurses learn symptom control and pain management whether in a syringe-driver, oral morphine or analgesic patches.

A stomatherapy service is available in some areas but has been privatised as a separate service in Gauteng and in the Western Cape.

However, our nursing staff assist with stoma care, wound care and other nursing procedures.

To be able to offer a service in the community CANSA has acknowledged that providing individual nursing care limits the number of patients who can be assisted. In providing a service CANSA collaborates with the Hospice Associations, other home care agencies and private nursing practitioners. None of these organisations will be able to offer in-patient hospice facilities or comprehensive nursing care in the future for all South Africans. The need for palliative care and home-

based care is an increasing problem in South Africa due to late presentation of illness, particularly in developing, disadvantaged communities.

CANSA sees the need to extend home-based care through teaching and supporting families to care for people with cancer in their own homes. Increased training of volunteers and community carers under the supervision of professional staff is part of the strategic development of CANSA services.

The Cancer Association appreciates its relationship with general practitioners, particularly those with good communication skills and sensitivity to patients' needs. CANSA does not interfere in the doctor-patient relationship or in the patient's treatment programme. Referrals are welcomed and as far as possible CANSA aims to meet the needs of people with cancer and in so doing, to be recognised as the leading organisation in cancer control in Africa.

*Frayne Furniss, Director: Patient Services, Cancer Association of South Africa, is a clinical nurse specialist in oncology who has been involved in teaching, examining students and in managing oncology services.*

### READING RESOURCES:

- Buckman R. What you really need to know about cancer: a comprehensive guide for patients and their families. Hodder Headline, Australia (Pty) Ltd 1996
- WHO National Cancer Control Programmes: policies and managerial guidelines. WHO, Geneva 1995
- Johnson J. I Can Cope: staying healthy with cancer: CHRONMED Publishing, 1994

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