

INTERVIEW WITH GRETTA HUTTON, SOCIAL WORKER.



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SPECIALTY AREA:

Oncology Social Work & Community Support Services

KEY FOCUS:

Supporting cancer patients and caregivers

WHO THIS IS FOR:

- *Individuals diagnosed with cancer at any stage of their journey*
- *Patients feeling overwhelmed, isolated, or unsure where to start*
- *Patients interested in advance care planning or decision-making support*

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- *Social workers help patients navigate cancer care.*
- *They provide emotional support, advocacy and practical help with finances, housing, transportation and home care.*
- *No one should face cancer alone, social workers empower patients and families with guidance and connection.*

Read the whole interview here:

AT WHAT POINT IN A PATIENT'S JOURNEY MIGHT SOMEONE MEET A SOCIAL WORKER?

“Social workers may become involved during several stages of a patient’s journey. Near the beginning, hospital social workers may help with logistical issues especially for patients who do not live near major cancer centres with parking passes, temporary lodging etc. Assisting with applications for financial assistance such as Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) may also be part of their role. Discharge planning which may include community supports may also be part of their role. Once at home, in a respite or retirement home setting, community social workers may also be involved to assist with ensuring clients are safe & accessing all available supports. I also encouraged clients to have Powers of Attorney & advance care planning in place”.

HOW DOES THE ROLE OF A SOCIAL WORKER DIFFER FROM A PATIENT NAVIGATOR?

“The navigator role may be filled by a social worker, nurse or other trained professionals in the healthcare system. I believe there is often a lot of overlap in the roles. Both social workers & nurses are registered with their respective professional colleges that have requirements for continuing education & professional standards of practice. Although there are courses & certification, I don't believe that there is a regulatory government college for navigators at this time”.

HOW DO YOU EMPOWER PATIENTS TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THEIR CARE DECISIONS?

“The stage of a client’s journey helped to determine what & how active they could be in their care decisions. Informed by my own cancer journey, initially, I was too ill to play an active role in my care decisions. As my health improved, I was able to participate much more actively in the process. Similarly, I encouraged my clients to find their voice to the degree that they were able”.

WHAT KINDS OF CHALLENGES DO PATIENTS AND FAMILIES COMMONLY COME TO YOU WITH?

“Clients were often unaware of the types of supports available to them in the community. Not all clients had tech access or skills needed to apply for these programs. Many financial programs can only be accessed if income tax had been correctly filed in previous years. Connecting clients with low or no cost tax filing services was a frequent ask”.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WISH EVERY PATIENT KNEW ABOUT SOCIAL WORKERS?

“I became aware that not all hospitals or even departments within hospitals routinely refer clients to social work. I wish that all clients could access the services of a social worker at least to ensure that they become aware of all the programs, supports & services available to them & are provided with assistance to access them. They do not have to navigate their journey alone”.