Giving Gifts Helps You Connect with Cancer Patients

by PAULA CLARK

Gift Ideas for Cancer Patients

Who would have thought a pair of cowboy boots could get a teenager through the brutal stress of cancer treatment?

A local couple had heard about my cancer diagnosis in the local newspaper. In the article I said something about wanting to kick the walls after my diagnosis, so they sent me a cowboy boots pendant along with a heartfelt note to make sure I could keep “kicking the walls during the times of the dark clouds.”

I still have the note nearly 30 years later. When something makes you feel like you matter, you treasure it. Sadly, the pendant was lost along the way, but the sentiment behind it remains.

That sentiment is connection. Giving is a great way to let cancer patients know they matter.

To give you some ideas, I asked other cancer patients* about the gifts that got them through treatment. Hopefully they’ll spark some ideas to help you connect with the cancer patient in your life.

Find Something Practical

Let’s get practical first. Cancer patients need to stay fed, safe from infection, comfortable when they’re in pain and feeling like themselves. Practical gift ideas for cancer patients are just as important as something more sentimental.

One of my cancer patient consultants suggested sending gift cards for groceries and other necessities. Others mentioned a U-neck pillow, fuzzy socks to keep feet warm during treatment, and anti-infection products like masks, alcohol pads, bleach and disinfectant wipes. During COVID-19, safety is more important than ever! So, you can support social distancing by gifting something like a Netflix subscription.

While we’re at it, what could be more comforting than a care package? In addition to the necessities, throw in their favourite tea, hand cream, pocket sanitizer, coloring postcards, scarves and hats, and a pillow you can heat in the microwave to soothe aches and pains.

Since a person’s identity can be greatly affected by cancer treatment, find practical items that have a personal touch. One of the patients I spoke to suggested “a really cute satchel for carrying or storing meds in”, or “cute ice cube trays forming different shapes like guitars – it makes the mundane feel fun”.

If your budget is tight, you can help out with your skills and time. Stop by every couple of weeks to clean or drop off meals that are easy to warm up. “After my wife was diagnosed her friends organized a “meal train” so they either cooked meals and brought them over or gave us gift cards for dinner. It was a huge help.”

You can also give your time by applying for grants that cover expenses for cancer patients. Too busy AND short on funds? Gift your travel points to help a far-flung family member come for a visit.

Finally, if the cancer patient in your life has everything, look for items designed especially for cancer treatment. “The absolute best gift my husband got was a chemo shirt! It has zippers on it to access his port for chemo treatments!”

How About Something Personal?

In addition to feeling like themselves, cancer patients need to know they matter.

If you can’t be there in person, blankets emblazoned with family photos have warmed the hearts (and legs) of many a cancer patient during chemo.

For someone who loves to paint, send paints and canvases so they can stay busy with something fun and therapeutic. Less artsy folks may appreciate adult coloring books and pencil crayons.

Journals also ranked high as a therapeutic gift. “The best gift was a journal. I wanted to keep track of thoughts, physical condition, etc. while on this journey.” Throw in a really nice pen for an added touch!

And finally, don’t forget that symbolism counts for a lot. Gift certificates don’t just buy necessities. Treating a cancer patient to a future coffee at their favourite cafe can give them hope.

Marking key milestones on the road to recovery does the same. “This [necklace] is the best gift I have ever had, from my best friend after I found out I don’t have cancer anymore. I never took this necklace off since 2010.”

Just Be There

In the end, what people need the most is to know they’re not alone.

I heard so many examples of how much it means to have people reach out with texts, calls, hugs, postcards, letters and offers to help with dog walking, baby sitting, cooking meals and shopping. Making the offer and staying in touch shows you care and offers some peace of mind.

But I think my consultants say it best in their own words.

“The best gift was my best friend Linda, who is retired now, offered to bring and sit with me at my chemo treatments.”

“My niece taking me to all my appointments, staying with me in the hospital during my surgery and offering to stay with me as long as I needed when I returned home for recovery.”

“I had a mentor get graphic designers (I am a graphic designer) from around the world to make get well videos and he put them all together into a get-well video for me.”

“I got to see my grandson for two weeks.”

“When my daughter and grandson showed up unexpectedly for my last chemo and videoed the ringing of the bell – very emotional.”

“I received a prayer shawl from a good friend. It came from her church, was prayed over by the minister and prayer team. I wear it when I go for treatment and at home too. When people you don’t even know are pulling for you it is powerful!”

“The greatest gift that continues to warm my heart is the fact that they all came together to support me in my time

of need.”

Connection Is the Key to Support

If you’re feeling lost about what to send, I hope you’ll agree there’s something in this gift ideas for cancer patients list for everyone.

The cancer patients in your life need you to stay connected to the world. And, don’t forget that giving and supporting others means that you matter too!

So, get out there and get giving! What you do to help will be remembered and appreciated, maybe even 30 years from now.

*quotes gathered from the following Cancer Support Groups on Facebook: Cancer Support Group and Lung Cancer and Caregivers Support Group.