

Resilience

Newsletter

ISSUE #08



Psychosocial Oncology & Cancer Patient Support Programs

Fall 2024



Welcome, Fall!

Thank you for taking some time to read our latest edition of *Resilience*, where we spotlight mental wellness, integrated care, a few of the latest developments in our specialized behavioral health clinics, and the great work of our colleagues throughout Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist's Comprehensive Cancer Center. We believe that patient care and professional engagement are further enriched by engaged, multidisciplinary collaborations. By featuring some wonderful people performing wonderful work, we hope to nurture our connections and foster appreciation of our joint efforts.

As Director of the Psychosocial Oncology and Cancer Patient Support Programs, I cannot be prouder of the humans who comprise our team. Not only is each oncology counselor working hard to accommodate new patient referrals, they are innovating and specializing in a range of behavioral health areas. We now offer specialized services in trauma-informed care, adjustment reactions, healing arts, grief and loss, adolescent and young adult care, couples and family systems work, and sexual and reproductive wellness care, in addition to having both English and Spanish-speaking services on-site.

This fall I want to extend a warm welcome to our newest teammate, Caleb Evington, LCSW, who is already well-known to many of you. Caleb specializes in caring for many of our teen and young adults, pre-vivors, as well as couples presenting with concerns related to sexual or reproductive wellness. He recently began formal training with Modern Sex Therapy Institute. Caleb hopes to build a specialized multidisciplinary clinic in collaboration with providers in oncology, endocrinology, and physical therapy in order to care for those whose sexual health has been impacted by a cancer diagnosis or cancer treatment. We are thrilled to have him join our team.

We also want to send a warm welcome to our newest intern, Anna Edson-Heussi, who will be completing a year-long clinical rotation with our team. Anna is a 3rd year clinical psychology doctoral student in the Appalachian State University doctor of psychology – clinical psychology (PsyD) program. She also holds a master's degree in developmental psychology from the University of York, UK. Anna will be a wonderful addition to the team and is accepting new outpatients.

Alongside team entrances, our former colleague, Lisa Rainwater, LCMHC has launched into the community to commence her own full time private practice. We celebrate the many contributions she made over the years to our team and patients in the areas of grief and loss, geriatrics and couples work, and group offerings. Her intellectual curiosity and passion for learning resulted in great growth within our internal group as well as in our group therapy offerings. Lisa is a strong working partner in our community, and we are glad that she remains a great resource for patients seeking community support.

Internally, we have lots of projects underway - please read on for more information! The CPSP team is excited to continue to grow while remaining true to our mission: offering timely and accessible integrated behavioral health care to cancer patients and their loved ones. If we can support you or one of your patients or their care partners, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. Be well.

Katie E. Duckworth, PhD, LCMHC
Director, POP/CPSP



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Rodgers Builders:

Championing Patients at SummerLark 2024

Rodgers Builders made the third annual SummerLark fundraiser and outdoor concert particularly meaningful this year. As the event's Patient Champion Sponsor, Rodgers Builders made it possible for 50 cancer patients and their families to experience the concert and enjoy the community spirit of the evening.

"At Rodgers, we are committed to building more than just structures; we believe in building strong, supportive communities. Our longstanding relationship with Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist has allowed us to partner on meaningful initiatives that make a real difference," said Todd Joyce, Senior Vice President at Rodgers Builders. "Our involvement in SummerLark aligns perfectly with our mission to give back in meaningful ways, and we are honored to support Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center's Cancer Patient Support Program. Providing the opportunity for patients and families to take part in this concert allows them to be part of the community who supports this great cause."

The third annual SummerLark fundraiser was held on May 11, 2024, at Bailey Park in Innovation Quarter and was hosted by the Office of Philanthropy and Alumni Relations at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist. Presented by **Allegacy Federal Credit Union**, the event supported the Cancer Patient Support Program (CPSP) at the National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center at Atrium Health Levine Cancer.

"The generosity of this community helps provide the services of the Cancer Patient Support Program for our patients. We are grateful for the support of partners to ensure no one faces cancer alone," said Lisa Marshall, Chief Philanthropy Officer and Vice President of Philanthropy and Alumni Relations at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist and Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

The Cancer Patient Support Program is crucial in offering emotional, psychological, and practical assistance to patients and their families. Funds raised through SummerLark account for up to 50% of the program's annual operating budget, highlighting the critical role of community generosity in sustaining these essential services.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to announce that **SummerLark will return to Bailey Park on Saturday, May 10, 2025**, with Rodgers Builders already confirmed as a returning sponsor. While the featured artist for next year's concert has yet to be announced, we encourage you to stay updated by visiting our [SummerLark event website](#).

Thank you for supporting us!



RODGERS

Our Passion is Building®



Healing Arts Therapy Clinic: Happenings



NEW 7th Floor Space: CPSP is thrilled to offer new opportunities for patients and providers in a resourceful and interactive space on the 7th floor of the Comprehensive Cancer Center that fosters healing, creative expression, and well-being.

The space will display a variety of art materials for patients, family members, and staff to enjoy throughout the day, either individually or with others, including:

- Healing Art Kits - small art projects patients can take to their rooms with guided instructions for individual exploration.
- CPSP Reflections Journal - a unique way for patients and families to share and connect with others during their hospital experience.
- Weekly Walk-in Art Therapy Sessions (Wednesdays 9:30AM-11:00AM) - include guided experiential activities and conversational topics for patients and caregivers to help support specific psychosocial and emotional needs during hospital treatments.
- Taking Good Care Provider Wellness Series - addresses common oncology provider experiences such as compassion fatigue, burnout, and grief. This will include:
 - Grab-and-go interactive wellness resources.
 - Lunchtime opportunities to enjoy art-making as an expressive outlet.
 - "Stressing Well" Lunch & Learn series, facilitated by a CPSP staff member
 - Interdisciplinary team support as requested (**For more information please contact Erica Fox, LCMHC, ATR-BC at 336-713-6952 or efox@wakehealth.edu**).



Open Studio: Our Healing Arts Therapy Open Studio offering remains available on Fridays, 1:00-2:30PM, on the 3rd floor in the hospitality room for all patients and accompanying caregivers. This is an outpatient offering for those looking to connect with others through art-making and supportive conversation.

THANK YOU to those who participated in the "Coming Together" project. We hope to display the first of several Coming Together pieces in the Cancer Center to foster a sense of community, connection, and creativity in their individual and shared experiences.

Collaboration with LCI: We are excited to collaborate with Artist in Resident, Andrea Sowle, at Levine Cancer Institute (LCI) in Charlotte. Will will extend her "Hexagons for Hope" project to individuals through our Healing Arts Therapy Clinic at the Comprehensive Cancer Center. To learn more about this project, visit: <https://youtu.be/M1rst922tiQ?si=EeEI0dj-SL4V4N0o>

Carol Curran, a member of the Patient and Family Advocacy Committee at AHWFB and pioneer Healing Arts Open Studio participant completes a hydrangea painting she made for her granddaughter.

Erica Fox, LCMHC, ATR-BC



Navigating Care with Compassion: A Conversation with Gilda Cowan, Navigator



On a crisp August afternoon, during an unseasonable cold front in the Southeast, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Gilda Cowan for a scheduled interview. She arrived at my office with her characteristic energy, a bright presence that instantly warmed the room. For the next hour, she settled into a comfortable chair, taking a well-earned pause from her busy routine of supporting patients and families throughout our cancer center. As we spoke, Gilda shared what launched her career in healthcare, what stimulates her enthusiasm, and how she maintains her own well-being while navigating the demands of her role.

Gilda is a bilingual oncology patient navigator in the Office of Cancer Health Equity, primarily serving Hispanic and Latino patients and their families. Her work extends across all departments of the cancer center, seamlessly integrating her presence into the healthcare team. Whether guiding patients from diagnosis to survivorship or supporting them through end-of-life care, it became clear that Gilda's role is indispensable throughout the course of our time together. Her ability to communicate in Spanish brings an immediate sense of relief to patients, offering culturally and linguistically appropriate care that bridges gaps often found in traditional healthcare settings.

During our conversation, Gilda highlighted the concept of "information overload" that many patients experience at the onset of treatment. She asked me to imagine the added challenges faced by those who are uninsured, underinsured, or unfamiliar with navigating a complex healthcare system designed primarily in English. Gilda meets patients early in their treatment, often during their initial consultation, and provides them with something invaluable: time. She listens, understands, and offers both broad and specific guidance to help patients traverse uncharted territory with confidence and increased health literacy. Beyond improving health literacy, Gilda plays a crucial role in facilitating timely access to care by demystifying paperwork and connecting families to resources that address social determinants of health.

Gilda's journey began when she immigrated to the United States from Peru as an adolescent. She vividly recalls interpreting for her family members and helping them navigate resources—a formative experience that now informs her professional work. She is proud of being bicultural and bilingual and an alumna of Salem College, the first women's college in the USA. Her role blends her personal and professional interests. Gilda shared several impactful stories that underscore the importance of her work, including helping patients on oral chemotherapy improve medication adherence. By acting as a liaison between patients and providers, she ensures that critical communication is clear and that patients receive the medical advice they need, preventing them from suffering in silence.

When I asked Gilda how she maintains her own well-being in such a demanding role, she beamed with enthusiasm. She regularly participates in running races that support cancer-related charities, bikes on local greenways, and enjoys staying active with her husband Sam and their dog Salem. For Gilda, movement is essential—whether she's walking the halls of the hospital or engaging in self-care beyond its walls. Her vitality and optimism are palpable, fueling her work, and providing a vital source of strength and support for the many families she serves.

Caleb Evington, LCSW





Local BBQ Restaurant Raises Money for Myeloma

City BBQ on Jonestown Rd. in Winston-Salem hosted an all-day fundraiser for the Cancer Patient Support Program's Multiple Myeloma Support Group on Friday, June 7. City BBQ donated 20 percent of sales to customers who mentioned that they were with Atrium Health and/or the Multiple Myeloma Support Group when placing their orders. Thirty-two people RSVP'd, raising \$185.49 for the support group. A fundraising page was also promoted and donors contributed an additional \$1,150 for a total of \$1,335.49 raised. The money went toward expenses for monthly meetings, including catering.

Approximately 20 multiple myeloma survivors and their family members from both the Comprehensive Cancer Center and Novant Health meet monthly for in-person "lunch and learn" events, excluding December. Members socialize before and after meetings, enjoying lunch free of charge.

Past presentation topics include: art therapy, identity development after cancer, financial toxicity, insomnia, fatigue, nutrition, understanding medical test results, and the risks/benefits of Car-T therapy, among many others. Donations are still being accepted through the [Multiple Myeloma Support Group fundraising page](#).



Emily LaFontaine with a friend
at City BBQ the day of the fundraiser

Donations make it possible for the Multiple Myeloma Support Group to continue meeting on a monthly basis. \$12.50 pays for lunch for one survivor; \$25 pays for lunch for one survivor and one care partner; \$100 pays for approximately half of one monthly meeting, including lunches for eight survivors and their care partners; \$250 pays for one monthly meeting, including lunches for 20 survivors and their care partners; and \$2,750 pays for a year's worth of meetings, including 220 lunches for survivors and their care partners. All meetings feature a speaker, the use of a conference room, utilities, and parking.

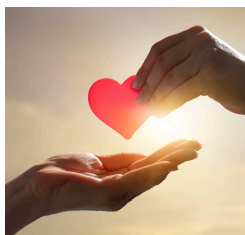
To our barbeque goers and gracious donors, thank you for helping foster educational/social support, self-efficacy, and meaning-making for multiple myeloma survivors!

A Special "Thank You" to: Catherine Dunn, John & Marjorie Harris, Dr. Dianna S. Howard, Mr. & Mrs. John F. Jowers, Mary Elizabeth Lonergan, George & Gloria Melton, Robin Rash, Cynthia & Morgan Ray, Dr. William C. Williams, three anonymous donors, and all of those who joined us at City BBQ!

Contact Emily LaFontaine, LCSWA at elafonta@wakehealth.edu for more information about the Multiple Myeloma Support Group.



Volunteer Spotlight



Heartfelt Service: An Interview with Judy Ditmore



At the Comprehensive Cancer Center, Judy Ditmore is a familiar and comforting presence. Judy has been volunteering at the hospital for over a decade, and her journey from working in the gift shop to helping patients with cancer shows her deep commitment to making a difference.

Steadfast Dedication

Judy started her volunteer work seventeen years ago in the hospital's gift store. Over time, her role has evolved as she's taken on various roles around the hospital. Now, every Tuesday, she is at the Comprehensive Cancer Center, where mornings are spent on the 4th floor and afternoons on the 1st and 3rd floors. Her responsibilities include ensuring patients reach their appointments on time, assisting with wheelchairs for those with mobility challenges, providing snacks and coffee, and offering a comforting presence.

"It doesn't take much for a volunteer to feel gratified," Judy says. Her focus is on creating small but meaningful connections with patients and their families.

A Personal Connection

Judy's decision to volunteer with cancer patients is deeply personal. "My husband passed away from pancreatic cancer 26 years ago, and I've been a cancer survivor for the last six years," she explains. These experiences have shaped her understanding and empathy, fueling her desire to give back. Her volunteer work is not just a role but a tribute to her own journey and a way to support others walking similar paths.

Finding Joy in Giving

What brings Judy the most joy in her volunteer role is the opportunity to ease the burdens of those she serves. "It's very rewarding to feel that I am giving back and making this challenging journey a little easier for others," she says. One aspect of her work she particularly cherishes is assisting patients with children. Recognizing that hospital visits can be lengthy, Judy provides coloring materials to help children pass the time, adding a touch of normalcy and fun to their day.

Memorable Moments

Judy has had many memorable moments and interactions over the years. She reflects on an interaction with a patient that spoke a different language than she. This patient was in the wrong location of their appointment. Judy was able to assist in helping her find the right location just in time for her appointment. Later in the day, when Judy saw the patient again, the woman's smile was a reminder of the impact of her help. In redirecting the patient was met with heartfelt gratitude. Over the following months, Judy has continued to see this patient and her children, and their friendly exchanges never fail to make Judy's day.

Judy's work at the Comprehensive Cancer Center highlights how one person can make a significant difference. Her story reflects the positive impact of compassion and the value of giving back to others.

Lindsay Seigenthaler, M.Ed, LCMHC, NCC

Survivor's Day 2024



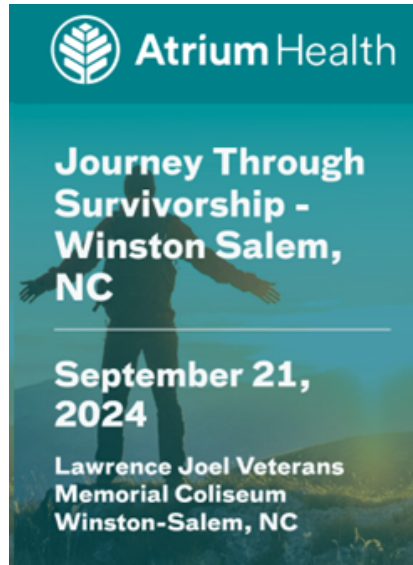
Cancer Patient Support Program staff joined providers, cancer survivors, and caregivers at the first annual **Journey through Survivorship** event in Winston-Salem on Saturday, September 21, 2024. This free event (held in-person and virtually) featured various educational and interactive breakout sessions for participants to empower and enlighten them on their individual and collective journeys.

Emily Lafontaine, LCSW spoke on the topic of “Managing the Financial Burden on Cancer,” Holly Hallman, LCSW, featured a breakout session on “Identity: Who am I during and after Cancer?”, and Erica Fox, LCMHC, ATR-BC, facilitated a group art project, “Hexagons for Hope,” a collaborative initiative with Levine Cancer Institute in Charlotte.

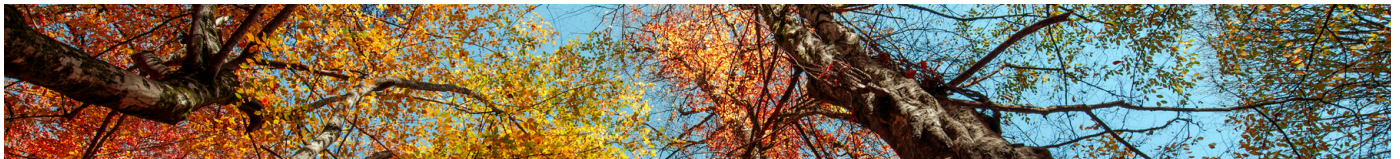
Thank you to those who joined us and for the opportunity to support you where you are in your journey!

Erica Fox, LCMHC, ATR-BC

(Below) Participant contributions to the Hexagons for Hope project. See *Healing Arts Therapy Happenings*, page 3, for more information.



(Above) Erica Fox, Holly Hallman, and Emily LaFontaine at Journey through Survivorship



Psychological Flexibility in ACT, part VI: Values

In previous editions of Resilience, we explored Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and its relevance for cancer care. ACT (pronounced like the verb “to act”) is an evidence-based treatment that promotes “psychological flexibility” – the capacity to respond flexibly to what is happening in life so that we can make intentional choices and move towards being the person we want to be (Hayes et al, 2012). Therapeutically, ACT divides psychological flexibility into six different, but coordinated components, the first four of which (Present-Moment Awareness, the Observer Self, Defusion, and Acceptance) have already been discussed. The fifth of these six components is Values.

In ACT, Values are defined uniquely and have several important features (LeJeune, et al, 2019):

- Values are behaviors (i.e., patterns of action). They are ways of living, not simply words.
- Values are freely and intentionally chosen. They are not the result of logical reasoning, outside pressure, family legacy, societal expectations, religious dogma, or moral rules.
- Values are life directions, not goals to achieve. Like a compass that guides you on a journey, they do not guarantee an outcome.
- Values are about what you want to move towards, not what you want to avoid.
- Values connect you with what is most meaningful to you, even in the presence of suffering

(continued next page)

Values are at the heart of ACT for cancer care because they help patients address issues of meaning and purpose. This could look like helping a metastatic patient weigh the pros and cons of working with Palliative Care because the value “being present for my spouse” requires better symptom management. Similarly, it could look like helping a newly diagnosed mother of two young children “unhook” from scary thoughts so that she spends her precious energy focused on the actions that align with “being a loving parent” rather than avoiding anxiety. To be clear, adequate time and attention are always paid to problem-solving, reality-testing, skill-building, and learning tools that increase resilience, but at the end of the day, ACT is about helping patients “...create for themselves a well-lived life rather than simply attempting to minimize their pain” (LeJeune, et al, 2019).

Please stay tuned for the next edition of *Resilience*, where we will begin to explore the sixth and final facet of psychological flexibility: Committed Action.

References:

Dahl, J., et al., 2009. *The Art and Science of Valuing in Psychotherapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Press.
Hayes, S.C., K.D. Strosahl, & K.G. Wilson, 2012. *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change*. 2nd Ed. New York: Guilford Press.
LeJeune, J. & Luoma, J., 2019. *Values in Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Press.
Wilson, K., 2024. *ACT for Values*, online course. Praxis Continuing Education.

Carrie Madsen, MS, LCMHC, NCC



Provider Spotlight

For this edition of *Resilience*, we interviewed **Julia Barry, MA, CCC-SLP**

1. What is your specialty and how long have you been practicing at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist?

Julia Barry is a dysphagia specialized speech pathologist at the Comprehensive Cancer Center. She obtained her master's degree at University of Pittsburgh and completed her clinical fellowship at the Cincinnati Veterans' Administration (VA). She has been with the team here for eight years, and has served as a lead clinician since 2019. Her subspecialty is caring for patients with head and neck cancer, and she sees patients as part of the multidisciplinary clinic at the Comprehensive Cancer Center as well as at her primary practice site at Medical Plaza Miller.

2. How have you utilized CPSP services?

I have often encouraged my head and neck cancer patients to take advantage of CPSP services in the past. More recently I've had the pleasure of working with the fantastic Holly Hallman as she has integrated into our multidisciplinary care team supporting patients undergoing radiation and chemo/radiation. Holly is an invaluable member of our team, and my hope is that earlier intervention and education about counseling can not only help patients acutely, but also establish a pathway that is easier for them to access post-treatment when psychosocial burden may become more apparent.

3. How do your patients benefit from working with one of our psychosocial oncology counselors?

Patients at all stages of head and neck cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship wrestle with mental health issues. This is well-documented in the literature, and anecdotally I encounter it every day in my clinical practice. Mental health challenges are such profound barriers to patients' recovery, and unfortunately I often see the most severe manifestations occurring in the months and years following treatment. Patients continue to experience lasting side effects including swallowing disorders, taste changes, altered physical appearance and other symptoms—so many changes are chronic. Patients struggle to acclimate to a “new normal,” and I believe that counseling is a crucial part of this journey. We all have a responsibility to our head and neck patients to help them meet their goal of living a fulfilling life, and one way we can do that is by encouraging them to access the mental health care they need



Carrie Madsen, MS, LCMHC, NCC





SummerLark 2024



Peer Support Program Recruiting Survivors



The Cancer Patient Support Program is recruiting survivors of breast, gynecologic, blood, and thoracic cancer for **S.O.S Connections**, a new peer support program! S.O.S Connections, short for Survivors Offering Supportive Connections, is a partnership between Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center and Atrium Health Levine Cancer Institute. Its mission is to facilitate opportunities for social support among cancer survivors who are currently undergoing active treatment with cancer survivors who have completed active treatment. Its vision is to empower cancer survivors across the diagnosis/treatment/survivorship continuum to create a sense of shared community through relationship-building and mutual aid.

The program is modeled after international stalwart *Immerman Angels*, but with local flair. Volunteer survivors, traditionally known as “mentors,” and patient participants, likewise known as “mentees,” will have the option to choose between a one-time connection or an ongoing connection of at least three interactions within three months.

Volunteer survivors are currently being recruited prior to matchmaking. Volunteer survivors must have completed active treatment at least six months prior to participating in the program. Alternatively, in the case of metastatic survivors, their medical team must deem them physically stable and/or undergoing maintenance treatment.

Volunteer survivors will need to receive a recommendation from a member of their medical team, as well as work with Volunteer Services for clearance. They may connect with just one or up to three patient participants at a time via phone, video, and/or an in-person meeting.

Though only breast, gynecologic, blood, and thoracic cancer survivors are currently being recruited, expanded offerings for other cancer types are forthcoming.

Providers, navigators, and support staff are encouraged to discuss the program with breast, gynecologic, blood, and thoracic cancer survivors who they believe would engage in empathetic conversation with patients undergoing similar situations.

Contact Emily LaFontaine, LCSWA at elafonta@wakehealth.edu to recommend a volunteer survivor, or for more information about S.O.S Connections.



Creating Community. Join Atrium Health's S.O.S Connections.

Currently Seeking Survivors Offering Support

Are you a breast, gynecological, blood, or thoracic cancer survivor who would like to help others going through a similar experience? We are recruiting volunteer survivors interested in sharing their stories!

Volunteer survivors must be (1) at least six months post-treatment, or (2) stable and undergoing maintenance therapy with access to a phone and/or email.



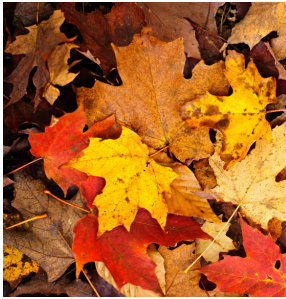
WE NEED YOU to volunteer for our peer support program!



Contact Emily LaFontaine, LCSWA to register and review the onboarding process:
336-716-2394 | elafonta@wakehealth.edu

Sponsored by Atrium Health Levine Cancer Institute's Department of Supportive Oncology and Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist's Cancer Patient Support Program.

The Cancer Patient Support Program



Mission

To reduce suffering and improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their loved ones across the lifespan, throughout survivorship and beyond.



Values

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Innovation
- Curiosity
- Collaboration
- Commitment to Service



Vision

To ensure no one faces cancer alone.



Objectives

- Reduce barriers to psychosocial support
- Collaborate with and support providers
- Optimize patient, caregiver, & family services
- Empower our community with shared knowledge and programming

About *Resilience*

Resilience is the newsletter of Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center's Psychosocial Oncology (POP) and Cancer Patient Support Program (CPSP) and is written and edited by POP/CPSP team members.

With this free publication, we seek to promote our psychosocial programming, provide psycho-education on wellness and mindfulness, and highlight the work of our integrated partners and their expertise.

Click [here](#) to learn more about our programming and access our previous newsletters.

