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From the Orlando Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/news/2017/10/05/when-cancer-and-career-collide-how-business.html>

When cancer and career collide: How business professionals reconcile myriad workplace issues

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What started off as a routine day for [Sarah Kelly](#) nine years ago quickly escalated into anything but.

The former vice president at Wayne Automatic Fire Sprinklers was scheduled for her annual mammogram, which she headed off to take care of before returning to the office for a Christmas party.

But after having the initial procedure, Kelly kept getting called back for more pictures. Then one Friday afternoon — after being at a sales retreat all day — Kelly had three voicemails on her mobile phone and four more on her home phone.

“One was the doctor telling me to bring a friend or family member with me to the follow-up appointment at 4 p.m. on Monday,” Kelley said.

There, with her mother, she was told she had breast cancer and would need to have lumpectomy surgery.

“Honestly, at first it felt like a death sentence.”

When the lumpectomy didn't get all the cancer, the next step was a double mastectomy, six months of chemotherapy and four months of radiation. Kelly worked full time through it all.

“Looking back on it now, work helped me feel normal — even though I eventually lost my hair,” Kelly said with a laugh.

Kelly's story isn't an isolated incident: In fact, one in eight women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. And with that diagnosis comes challenges and needs.



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An abstract map of the United States with a breast cancer / pink ribbon theme, painted with watercolor in different shades of pink. Map is isolated on a white background. Raster illustration.

So how do these women juggle medical treatments, surgery, recovery and work?

Here are a few of their stories — and how their workplaces successfully helped them deal with the daunting challenges that arise when cancer and career collide.

Working with cancer

Yamile Luna has battled breast cancer twice.

Both times, the Florida Hospital assistant vice president of community impact and social responsibility found herself on the other side as a patient, with her co-workers as her doctors. And that was surreal for Luna, who then was vice president of the Florida Hospital Cancer Institute.

“All these decisions I had made in the past [related to others] were now going to be my fate,” she said.

Luna first was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 2012, and then the following year underwent chemotherapy, a double mastectomy and radiation.

For two months, she worked from 7 a.m. to noon, heading off to radiation treatment at 1 p.m.

Despite having to deal with the after-effects of chemotherapy and radiation — which can cause side effects including fatigue, nausea, mouth sores, nose bleeds and an increased risk of infection — the experience allowed Luna to see firsthand the important work she and her co-workers do.

“When a doctor would put a warm blanket on me, I could tell if they cared or if they were just checking off a box,” Luna said. “There is just a different level of connection. It made me feel like everything was OK — a heightened feeling of ‘I can do this.’ ”

That sense of care from co-workers also helped Kelly as she underwent breast cancer treatment.

“Everyone was great at work; it turned out that I was the first of several co-workers who wound up dealing with cancer issues,” Kelly said. “Even though you sometimes feel awful, you just want to do normal things.”

On days when she was extra tired, Kelly would work from home. Or she would take small breaks to rest throughout the day.

But one of the most important things she learned while battling breast cancer and working full time was to manage stress. Kelly remembers having to shut the door to her office some days to block out the office noise.

Kelly also turned to a mind, body and spirit program at Orlando Health, which taught her about mindful eating, yoga and energy management — all of which provided the support she needed to push through the medical necessities.

“No one will remember how many hours you worked,” she said. “It’s about family and friends. It makes you look at life differently.”

Workplace communication is key

About 18,170 women in Florida will learn they have breast cancer in 2017. And that means the diagnosis isn't only an incredibly personal experience for the patients, it also becomes a sensitive issue for businesses.

Besides dealing with the Family & Medical Leave Act, other issues can arise related to the type of work the employee handles, how long he or she may be out for surgery and/or treatment, and unexpected personal health setbacks that can occur when dealing with breast cancer treatment.

The bottom line for employers: Communication is key.

"There are some legal restrictions you may encounter, but you need to get as much information as possible on how long the employee expects to be out, will they be able to handle their job when they return or will they need to do light duty or limited duty," said Patrick Muldowney, an Orlando employment lawyer and partner at BakerHostetler.

Most businesses want to do the right thing for an employee, but how to accomplish that sometimes can get complicated.

"One important thing you need to figure out is whether or not the worker will — or can — come back to work," Muldowney said. "That's why communication is critical for both parties."

Kim Ouellette, regional human resources manager at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, agreed, adding that employee assistance plans can be extremely helpful as you navigate breast cancer treatment.

"There are a lot of resources that you might not be aware of, so it's important to talk to your HR manager to make sure you are able to take advantage of everything from the Family & Medical Leave Act to additional leave of absence programs, as well as counseling and support services," she said.

Other suggestions for businesses from Muldowney were:

Although the absence of a worker may put added burdens on others, don't give them too much additional work. It's important to take care of the sick worker and your healthy ones.

If the worker has job duties that will be difficult to perform during or after treatment, you then must weigh whether you are able to assign them other types of duties or lighter duty for a while.

"There's not always a clear line on what is reasonable and what's not," Muldowney said.

Even so, it's amazing what companies do for workers dealing with breast cancer, Ouellette said: "Smart companies are the ones that understand the value of being compassionate and caring in times of need."

Quick facts

A bit about breast cancer

Did you know that one in eight women in the United States will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime? In fact, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women. Here are some other stats about the disease:

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women.

This year, an estimated 252,710 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed in women

in the U.S., along with 63,410 new cases of non-invasive (in situ) breast cancer.

About 40,610 women in the U.S. are expected to die this year from breast cancer, though death rates have been decreasing since 1989. Women under 50 have experienced larger decreases. These decreases are thought to be the result of treatment advances, earlier detection through screening and increased awareness.

Although breast cancer in men is rare, an estimated 2,600 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer and approximately 440 will die each year.

On average, every 2 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer and one woman will die of breast cancer every 13 minutes.

As of March, there were more than 3.1 million women with a history of breast cancer in the U.S. This includes women currently being treated and women who have finished treatment.

Source: BreastCancer.org

Closer look

Tips for working during treatment

Plan chemo treatments late in the day or right before the weekend to allow time to recover.

Explore options such as working from home some days. This might help you feel less tired and allow you to take care of yourself more easily if you have problems.

Getting help at home can mean more energy for work. Certain daily chores may be divided among friends and family members.

Unless there is a reason not to, let co-workers know about your situation. They can be great sources of support. They may even be able to help you come up with ways to better manage your work during this time.

Keep your supervisor up to date on how well your schedule or other changes are working for you.

Make a log of your usual work schedule and duties. Refer to it when you set up flex time, shifted duties or time off.

Make a detailed list of job duties so you can direct others in handling things when you're out of the office.

Source: American Cancer Society

Technological Fieldwork

Scientific Research Grant awards

From the years 2016 to 2018:

\$199,381

Tuya Pal, M.D.

Facility: H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute Inc.

Study: Prognosis and outcomes of women with PALB2-associated breast cancer etiology (PROMISE): A pilot study

\$199,937

Masanobu Komatsu, Ph.D.

Facility: Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute

Study: MicroRNA control of vascular integrity in breast cancer

\$200,000

Shuang Huang, Ph.D.

Facility: University of Florida

Study: Deterring breast cancer metastasis by restoring miRNA processing

\$200,000

Dorraya El-Ashry, Ph.D.

Facility: University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine

Study: Cancer-associated fibroblasts communicate via secreted miRNAs to drive breast cancer progression

\$200,000

Joyce M. Slingerland, M.D., Ph.D.

Facility: University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine-Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center

Study: Mechanistic links between changing estrogen profiles, inflammation and the increased risk and metastasis of breast cancer in obese women

Source: Florida Breast Cancer Foundation

Average per-patient costs by service type in 2016

Diagnosis	0-12 months	13-24 months
Stage 0	\$60,637	\$13,523
Stage I/II	\$129,387	\$35,801
Stage III	\$134,682	\$69,464

Source: American Health & Drug Benefits

2017 Statistics

 **18,170**
 Estimated new cases of breast cancer in Florida

 **2,910**
 Estimated deaths caused by breast cancer in Florida

 **252,710**
 Estimated new U.S. female patient cases

 **2,470**
 Estimated new U.S. male patient cases

Source: American Cancer Society