

Alicia Patten

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

Hi I'm Alicia Patten.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

And I'm Lizette Figueroa-Rivera.

Alicia Patten

We're the hosts of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's patient podcast, "The Bloodline with LLS."

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera

A few years ago, we met some young adults who were completing their treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL).

Alicia Patten

And they were gracious enough to join us today. Let's see how they're doing.

Abby-Gail Solomons, MSW, AAS

*Courtelis Center for Psychosocial Oncology
UM Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center*

Young adults' needs are different because they're now in a unique area of their life. They're now transitioning into independence, trying to navigate work, trying to navigate school, peers, relationships, family life, so with this added layer of being diagnosed and going through treatment, it can become a lot for any young adult, and overwhelming. There's a lot of concerns and fears. This is a time where usually anyone would be going on to college, embarking on a new career, and now they're concerned with diagnosis, cancer, and treatment.

Jeremy

Survivor

So, I was in college when I was diagnosed, but going into the workforce, I was still in treatment so I did have to tell my employer, or I felt that it was appropriate because I knew I was going to have to get treatment, chemo, be out a couple of times to get different procedures done and I was very much upfront because I said to myself, "if they find out and they don't want to work with me, then I don't want to work for them."

Stephen
Survivor

I was actually out of work for about eight months. I would be able to do some assignments from my hospital bed. I'm in finance so I was able to just use a laptop to be able to do certain things.

Betty
Survivor

My old job was actually amazing. They paid for my health insurance for six months. Everybody donated their vacation and sick time to pay for my health insurance for six months.

Javier
Survivor

That's awesome.

Betty

Because I had just come back from maternity leave, so I didn't have any vacation time, I used it all so they all chipped in. It's great to have that support system at work.

Stephen

I had that same experience actually. My co-workers, the few that knew what I was going through, they donated time and even some others who didn't know all the details, but they knew I was out, they donated their vacation and sick time and all that and I was able to get an actual salary for a lot of it. I was so blessed to have that and work with such great people and it was amazing.

Betty

Do you think that if they weren't so understanding you would still be with them?

Stephen

You know, that's a great question. Probably not, because I mean that's probably the reason why I've been there for so long now, but because they were so supportive. If they weren't, I don't think I could have been there. Because...

Javier

They would have let you go.

Stephen

Yeah, yeah. I think in a lot of circumstances that's the unfortunate thing that people have gone through. They go through all these medical issues and have to worry about their own health, and then...

Betty

They lose their job.

Stephen

They lose their jobs in the process. I can't imagine going through that.

Javier

I was in middle school when this happened, so I had no career plans or anything like that. At the company I'm with now, I've been there for about five years almost and I do just yearly checks now, just do blood checks once a year to make sure every—you know, my platelets and everything are okay. So, my company doesn't really need to know about it. I don't really like sharing this information with anyone. But a coworker of mine, she was recently diagnosed with breast cancer and she had a lot of questions. I guess that's when I opened up and my colleagues found out what I had because at that point no one really knew and luckily that helped me. I was able to help her, point her in the right direction of certain things that I was able to answer certain questions.

Jeremy

I'm in a similar camp. I don't really offer the information to people. I don't really love talking about it. But if I see somebody who is going through cancer or an illness, if it fits and it's appropriate and I think I can contribute in a positive way, I might offer that information and also to show them there is another side.

Jeremy

What was interesting though in my career path, might have adjusted slightly because of what I went through. Because I ended up getting some healthcare clients and I kind of attached myself to the health care clients because I think I knew what it was like to be a patient. I knew what it was like a little more than some other industries. And I'm still in the healthcare education area now.

Betty

Since I can remember I always said I wanted to be a nurse. So, going through this, it kind of like relit that fire. Watching the nurses taking care of me and it kind of pushed me to go back to school to become a nurse. But since I'm still going through issues from the aftermath, surgeries and rheumatoid arthritis and chronic pain, I'm afraid if I go to an employer and off the bat be like, "I have to go to this doctor's appointment. I have this appointment. I have to see this specialist." that I kind of won't be seen as the person that I want to be seen and I'll be seen as the cancer patient.

Javier

Yeah. Same here. I don't like to be treated differently. I don't want anybody to ever bring that up. I just kind of want it to be like a normal person.