**Company Spotlight: Inova Peterson Life with Cancer Sexual Health Program**

The Inova Peterson Life with Cancer sexual health program evolved out of a recognized need and multifaceted approach to sexual wellness for individuals affected by cancer. Emphasizing a holistic, bio-psycho-social-sexual model, the program provides a comprehensive range of services that addresses a critical gap identified by the INOVA team and patients.

Jennifer Bires is the Executive Director of Life with Cancer and Patient Experience for the Inova Schar Cancer Institute. She is a Licensed Oncology Social Worker with many years of experience. Lauren Broschak is an oncology-certified Licensed Clinical Social Worker who joined the Life with Cancer team in May 2019. Both have a commitment to the INOVA Life with Cancer Program and have helped many people with cancer get the help and support they need.

**Holistic Approach and Program Offerings**

A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion strengthens the program’s framework. "We consider the whole person including their diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities in our discussions about sexuality and cancer," says Broschak, ensuring every patient receives personalized, respectful care.

Broschak continues, “The program offers counseling for individuals and couples, sexual health consultations, fitness programs, support groups, and educational resources tailored to those affected by cancer.” Offering a variety of programs ensures that patients receive well-rounded support addressing both physical and emotional needs.

**Initial Goals and First Year Goals**

Jennifer Bires explains, "The initial goal was to meet a gap we were hearing about from our patients. We aimed to build the foundation of a program that could evolve to provide comprehensive care."

The first year of the program and as it started to evolve, says Bires, “We learned that it’s important to start and not get caught up in being perfect to ensure patients get the help now that they need.” The program’s starting point provided a place to grow from with continued work towards a more comprehensive program which continues to grow today.

**Future Aspirations and Evolution**

Looking ahead, the program aims to establish a comprehensive sexual medicine service addressing the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of sexual health. Bires notes, "In the next 5 years, we envision a program that fully encompasses the multifaceted needs of our patients, including a comprehensive program with sexual health experts who understand the unique impact of cancer and its treatment on the patient and their current or future partner(s).”

**Measuring Impact and Tracking Outcomes**

To ensure effectiveness, the program relies on patient feedback and rigorous evaluations. "We gauge impact through the eyes of our patients and track participation to meet ongoing needs," says Bires. This patient-centered approach ensures that services remain relevant and impactful.

**Sustaining Success**

The program thrives due to a dedicated team passionate about expanding its reach and impact. "Our clinicians bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, continually refining our offerings based on patient needs," says Broschak. Medical colleagues play a crucial role, referring patients to these vital services, which patients frequently request.

**Patient Engagement and Feedback**

Patients have responded positively, with high engagement levels in educational and support programs. "Patients have enthusiastically shared their appreciation for the care we provide in this important quality of life space," Broschak notes. Feedback highlights improved sex lives, boosted confidence, and a sense of community among participants. As one participant from the Men’s Sexual Health Series commented, “LWC [Life with Cancer] is to be commended for taking this initiative.”

**Adapting to Community Needs and Evidence-Based Practices**

As research advances, the program is committed to staying current with the latest evidence and incorporating community feedback. "Including patient stakeholders and considering cultural nuances is crucial for a topic as sensitive as sexual health," emphasizes Bires.

“At the core of the program are evidence-based practices such as CBT, ACT, and couples counseling, ensuring the highest standards of care. The team employs these methods to address functional changes, desire, arousal, and communication challenges,” says Broschak.

Staff stay up to date with the latest evidence-based practices through continuing education courses, reading new research articles, and monthly sharing clinical conversations and expertise. Several sexual health societies such as The Scientific Network on Female Sexual Health and Cancer, American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, Sexual Medicine Society of North America, and others provide up to date research as well.

**Success Stories**

“LWC [Life with Cancer] is to be commended for taking this initiative. Talking about survivors’ sexual health has been a missing component of health care.” - Evaluation common from the Men’s Sexual Health Series.

“They’re great. Know when to just let us Cancer survivors talk and when to jump in and give their input.” “They are kind and intimately responsive to each of us.”- Evaluation about program facilitators for one of the sexual health support groups.

**Lessons Learned and Continuous Evolution**

Reflecting on the program's first year, Bires shares, "We learned that it's important to start. Patients need help now, so we just began and have continued to grow from there." This proactive mindset has been instrumental in building a responsive and evolving program.

The Inova Peterson Life with Cancer sexual health program demonstrates the power of addressing unmet needs with compassion and expertise. Through continuous learning and adaptation, it remains dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for cancer patients and their partners.

To learn more about Life with Cancer, visit [lifewithcancer.org](https://www.lifewithcancer.org/).