



spotlight on health

National Program Helps Young Adult Cancer Survivors Move Forward

(NAPSA)—While most teenagers worry about prom dates and getting their driver's licenses, an increasing number of young adults are worrying about hair loss, a weak immune system, skin problems, fatigue and infertility.

That is because cancer is the leading cause of disease-related death among children and teenagers. And although survival rates for childhood cancer have increased, resources to help young survivors cope with the new, often confusing or frightening world they face after a serious illness are minimal.

To help these teenagers and young adults progress after a serious illness, the National Marrow Donor Program® (NMDP) Office of Patient Advocacy developed "Forward"—a resource designed specifically for teenagers and young adults who have had a marrow or cord blood transplant.

"Forward" helps teens learn about and understand the challenges of living with life-threatening diseases, such as leukemia, and life after a marrow transplant.

Survival Is a Journey

Young survivors may undergo months of treatment, which can include marrow transplants and chemotherapy. When treatment is complete, they are months, if not years, behind in school. In most cases, they have lost their hair, along with a great deal of their strength.

Many have lost the ability to ever have children of their own. And their social life and confidence are often significantly impacted.

When 21-year-old Mary Lee from Minneapolis was a teenager, she kept busy with cheerleading,



HEALTHY AND HOPEFUL about the future, Mary plans to complete high school and become an actress, a model or a nurse.

dance, theatre and gymnastics until she was diagnosed with aplastic anemia at age 18. Recovery after receiving her marrow transplant was difficult. While in the hospital her long hair fell out, and months of isolation left her feeling depressed.

A Remarkable Comeback

Surviving cancer is filled with uncertainties and insecurities. Mary made a remarkable comeback, but thankfully, she didn't have to do it alone. Now, Mary is appearing in the NMDP's "Forward" program to help other teenagers going through similar situations.

"I hope 'Forward' will help others deal with the same fears about recovery that I had," said Mary. "After going through treatment, I felt so overwhelmed by the idea of getting back into life. But with the help of my family and friends, I

realized that I really could do it. And I want to help others realize they can do it, too."

Because survival rates for cancer have dramatically increased, chances are, every community will be home to a cancer survivor at some point. Communities can offer a powerful tool to help young survivors overcome their posttreatment challenges. It's easy to be supportive without being intrusive:

•Strike a note of support.

You may never know the incredible impact a card or a phone call can have on a survivor's spirits.

•**Help them get back on track.** One of the most daunting hurdles of surviving cancer is getting caught up at school. Friends can make sure that no survivor ever feels alone. Teachers can also play a crucial role by offering extra help as well as classroom modifications that might ease the stress.

•Look for resources to help.

Programs such as "Forward" can help teens learn from the experiences of others and let them know their feelings aren't strange or unique. Case managers through NMDP's Office of Patient Advocacy are available to provide support and answer questions about marrow transplants at 1-888-999-6743. Information is available at www.marrow.org/patient.

•**Join the fight for other survivors.** Even if you aren't close to the cancer survivor in his or her community, you can help others. Donate blood or register to be a marrow donor. It's easy to register with the National Marrow Donor Program online at www.marrow.org/join.