

Cancer Hope Network celebrates 40 years of service; honors co-founders Diane Paul, RN, MS and Kris Luka, RN, BS

In 1980, there was no 1-1 peer support for cancer patients. Today, the organization has provided support for more than 50,000 patients, caregivers & survivors.

CHESTER, NJ, UNITED STATES, October 11, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A cancer diagnosis is frightening and unknown. It can bring surprising isolation for the patient undergoing treatment and the loved ones in their corner. In the late 70s and early 80s, a cancer diagnosis often felt like a death sentence, with patients asking their care teams “Do you know anyone who was helped by this treatment?”



Cancer Hope Network Founders Diane Paul, RN, MS and Kris Luka, RN, BA

In 1980, there were no social service agencies or nonprofits providing [one-on-one peer support](#)

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For patients facing a devastating illness like cancer, there is a need for support from all modalities....There is nothing quite like hearing the words, ‘I’ve been there,’ to inspire hope.”

Diane Paul, RN, MS

for cancer patients. Diane (Byrnes) Paul, working as an oncology nurse, heard many of her patients asking whether anyone getting their same treatment had similar side effects and fears – with many of them saying that the treatment was worse than the disease. They needed the reassurance of speaking with someone who’d walked the same path. Their experiences solidified Diane’s observations that a survivor could help patients better understand their treatment and be less fearful of the possible side effects. But those connections and the accompanying comfort were ad-hoc, without consistency or oversight. At that time, the only support programs being

offered were in group settings.

The need for individual care inspired a revolutionary idea - one-on-one peer support for cancer patients. Diane presented the project to the Junior League of Elizabeth-Plainfield (JLEP), a women's volunteer organization aimed at improving communities and the social, cultural and political fabric of society. A committee including Diane, co-founder and fellow nurse Kris Luka, and other dynamic women of the JLEP, was formed. The group gathered medical professionals, cancer survivors, clergy members and community volunteers to develop and form CHEMOcare, now Cancer Hope Network. In the first year, the organization served 14 patients.

Since those early days, the organization has provided support for more than 50,000 patients, caregivers, and survivors in search of hope. Our growing cohort of nearly 500 volunteers have faced more than 80 cancer types – more than 98% of the cancer that are diagnosed each year – can provide support in 15 languages and range in age from 19-94.

Cancer Hope Network will recognize Diane Paul and Kris Luka and celebrate the group's anniversary at their annual Chrysalis Gala on Saturday, October 16, 2021. The event will be held at Black Oak Golf Club.

"As a longtime member of the Cancer Hope Network team now charged with leading the organization, I'm grateful to Kris and Diane for their forward-thinking vision in developing our program and their ongoing commitment to ensuring no one faces cancer alone," said CHN Executive Director Cynthia Gutierrez Bernstein.

Once seen as revolutionary, the need for peer support is now recognized as a critical piece of full-patient care for people facing cancer. "For patients facing a devastating illness like cancer, there is a need for support from all modalities – professional, family, and friends. A survivor mentor brings value to the mix. There is nothing quite like hearing the words, 'I've been there,' to inspire hope," said founder Diane Paul. "Speaking with a cancer survivor or caregiver who has walked the same road brings a layer of lived experience that is emotionally beneficial for patients' sense of well-being. Such connections may make all the difference in how someone lives through the challenge of cancer."

"What began as a group of dedicated volunteers balancing young families and long hours has grown into a still-dedicated army of mentors receiving professional training and support as they provide hope and care for cancer patients and caregivers across the nation," said co-founder Kris Luka. "CHEMOcare, now known as Cancer Hope Network, was built with a focus on connection, with a commitment to creating hope. I'm gratified to see that commitment continue to pay dividends of improved lives."

To schedule an interview with Diane or Kris, or to learn more about Cancer Hope Network, please contact Sarah Miretti Cassidy, Director of External Affairs at 908.879.4039 ext 120 or scassidy@cancerhopenetwork.org.

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About Cancer Hope Network

Cancer Hope Network provides free one-on-one peer support to adult cancer patients and their loved ones. Our 400+ survivor and caregiver volunteers provide support from diagnosis, through treatment and into survivorship – including bereavement, when necessary.

Support Volunteers have faced more than 80 types of cancer. (More than 98% of the cancers that will be diagnosed this year.) They speak 15 languages, are located across the country, and are prepared to offer hope and guidance through a wide variety of challenges that accompany a cancer diagnosis.

All volunteer and client matches are overseen from beginning to end by a team of healthcare and social work professionals.

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