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# Losing One's Right to Complain

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*As Americans, we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I would like to add that, despite being diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer, I also have my sacred right to complain.*

A cancer survivor is expected to always be positive, cheerful, and optimistic. If you verbalize any physical complaint whatsoever or fail to have a sunny outlook, you are usually scolded severely by family and friends. Apparently, once you have cancer, you must be so ecstatic about simply being alive that you no longer have the right to say anything negative.

Once you have cancer, bad days must become a thing of the past. Receive a cancer diagnosis and you may never scowl again. If you have hair that is thinning because of chemo, you are told that your hair is beautiful as it is. If you are plumped up with steroids, you are told that you look great with those nice, pink cheeks. You are constantly reminded that you look good, so it must mean that cancer is gone.

You are told that if you remain positive, you will be cured. It doesn't matter what the doctors tell you. If you have faith, you will be cured. The people that tell you how you should act and feel are the same people that complain about headaches, toothaches, body aches and bad hair days. They have the right to complain because they don't have a life-threatening illness. They have the luxury of worrying about the little things. I have news for non-cancer survivors—there are a lot of positive cancer patients residing six feet under.

Despite having cancer, I have not suddenly become superhuman. Many of the treatments for cancer feel worse than the disease. I have the right to say that the treatments are difficult to handle. Cancer treatments are expensive and it is normal for me to complain about my finances. I am entitled to feel upset just like anyone else. I am not obligated to act more positive or happier than I actually feel just because I have cancer.

My complaints do not mean that I have given up. They do not mean I will not continue taking treatments. Complaining allows me to vent and work through my feelings. If my family and friends feel uncomfortable being around a person who is honest about her feelings, then I suggest they don't hang around a cancer survivor. Cancer is difficult enough and I don't have the time or inclination to put on an act.

Cancer is a lonely disease. If someone wants to help a cancer survivor, they should

just listen. While many people are quick to tell me everything will be fine, few people are willing to let me talk about death, fear about treatment, and how cancer has changed my life.

If you have rolled your eyes as you listened to your friends admonish you on your less-than-stellar cancer survivor behavior, tell them to be real friends. Tell them to be quiet and listen. Tell them to withhold their judgment on how you should act until they have been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. Or hand them this essay and walk away. My life is no less precious or lived less well just because I complain.