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# A Helping Hand

BY MARC SILVER

“We live in a world of shrinking resources,” says Hester Hill Schnipper, LICSW, OSW-C, chief of oncology social work at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. That means single cancer patients may have a harder time getting help than in years past, whether it’s a cab voucher from the hospital or a Meals on Wheels dinner.

Nonetheless, there are many resources that can be invaluable to someone who’s facing down cancer on their own—as well as steps that can help them be self-sufficient.

> **Seek a social worker.** One who’s affiliated with a cancer center is the best source for information about local programs that can provide transportation, meals, support groups, and other services that could be vital for an independent cancer patient.

> **Contact a nonprofit group.** The Wellness Community ([www.thewellnesscommunity.org](http://www.thewellnesscommunity.org)) and Gilda’s Club ([www.gildasclub.org](http://www.gildasclub.org)) have many local branches that offer a good way to connect with the cancer community. The American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)) has a 24-hour information hotline (800-227-2345) with specialists that can link you up with resources in your area.

> **Consider a counselor.** The American Psychosocial Oncology Society will take a message on its toll-free number (866-276-7443) from individuals seeking a therapist, and will return the call within 48 hours with recommendations in the person’s community.

> **Assess transportation needs.** As a rule, hospitals will not release a patient who has had a procedure under anesthesia unless a friend or family member is available to accompany the individual home. If this is a problem, a volunteer may be able to fill the role. If the issue is getting back and forth from the hospital, there may be a hospital van or cab vouchers available for those in need.

> **Take care of necessary business before surgery.** If your mobility will be decreased after a surgical procedure, there’s a host of tasks that should be handled: changing bed linens, laying out clothes for your return home, stocking

up on food, making (and freezing) meals, and filling post-op pain prescriptions.

> **Don't forget the pets.** Alison Woodman was in a panic—how would she feed her cat after cancer surgery, since she couldn't bend over. Put the food on a table and the cat can jump up, some single cat lovers advised.

> **Sign up for a free website.** Online resources for organizing support include CaringBridge ([www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)), Lotsa Helping Hands ([www.lotsahelpinghands.com](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com)), and Share The Care ([www.sharethecare.org](http://www.sharethecare.org)). Posting needs, such as meals, transportation, and child care, and waiting for responses may be easier than asking individuals for help.