

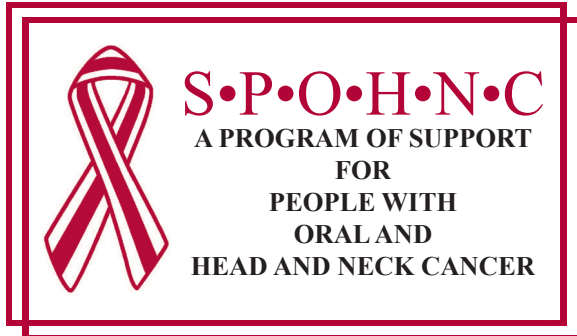
NEWS FROM S·P·O·H·N·C



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Reconnecting With Your Spiritual Self ... In Spite of the Holidays

Alan Wright, Chaplain

Having been a chaplain for almost 20 years now, I can say that facilitating the Dallas, TX chapter of SPOHNC for the past 10 years is one of the most rewarding parts of my career. I've had the sincere pleasure of meeting a diverse group of people who have more in common than cancer. They're some of the most hopeful people I know. And though some of them will chuckle when they read this, they're some of the most spiritual people I know, too. Some choose to express their spirituality in traditional ways like religious practice. Others choose other routes. The entire support group, however, has practiced spirituality through generosity and altruism. Their dedication to encourage people with oral, head and neck cancer is a spiritual act in and of itself. A few in our group will tell you that they discovered this spiritual side of themselves quite by accident. It was through their diagnosis and even their suffering that they experienced something deeper within themselves.



Many of our SPOHNC group members who received their treatment a good while back see the side effects of radiation and surgeries appearing yet again. Perhaps it's dental issues, or a returning restriction of their esophagus. In some of the more difficult cases, we've had members be told by their physician that they will never eat again. I would imagine that such news could be spiritually and emotionally debilitating. Yet even through all the difficult diagnoses, setbacks and side effects, I see incredible resilience and a severe hope.

Having to deal with all the challenges that come with a cancer diagnosis, the last thing needed is more challenges. Am I right?

We are entering the most intense and sometimes stressful part of the holiday season and it can at times be more than one can handle. Oddly enough the holidays can easily make you feel "unspiritual."

Whether you are a religious person or not, the holiday season can be overwhelming due to expectations from family and friends, overall busyness and, of course, the overabundance of food and drink constantly being spread before you. It's enough to make you want to hide away for the next 3 months. As an antidote, I encourage you to look around at your fellow survivors. Here is what I've learned from the good people of the Dallas SPOHNC group:

1. **Perspective.** It is possible to gain new perspective on the holiday season because survivors of oral, head and neck cancer are experts on perspective because they've had to gain a new outlook on life. Pam, for example, has had to reprioritize the importance of food. Once a central part of fellowship, fun and pleasure, food is now at the bottom of her list of priorities. What's at the top of her list? You may have guessed that it's family and faith. This holiday season, we have the opportunity to follow suit.
2. **Hope over optimism.** Optimism will fail you every time. Hope endures. Hope isn't as passive as we would like to think. We often make the mistake of thinking hope is something upon which we wait. Hope, rather, is something we find. When you attend a SPOHNC support group or assist another survivor, you are expressing hope. Jack and Dan, and so many others repeatedly prove that there's no better way to help you than to help someone else. This holiday season, make a donation to your favorite charity or listen to another cancer survivor who is struggling.
3. **Myth-busting via meditation/prayer.** You have the ability to stop the madness. If it's the commercialism of the holidays that drives you to the brink, you're the only one that can do something about it. Or perhaps, the expectations to constantly be happy during the "sparkliest" time of the year makes you want to scream. Again, you are the one that can put the kibosh on all these expectations or myths that we have to be a certain way from November through January. Linda taught me that good ole determination and grit can get you far, but only so far, and then you have to pray. And if praying isn't your thing, then taking time to be at peace with yourself and drown out the unnecessary noise of the holidays can have a lasting effect on our spiritual health.
4. **Be spiritually alert.** This will look differently for different people. For some, this spiritual alertness might be a quiet change that no one notices but you and those closest to you. Others might take up the cause of advocacy for people with oral, head and neck cancer. Instead of allowing the holiday buzz to work against you, use the overabundance of the

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