

## Survivors' Stories & Testimonials

The Cayman Islands Cancer Society encounters new cancer survivors each week, many of whom have useful words of advice and support for others who have been newly diagnosed or are currently going through cancer treatment. If you're in search of information on the personal experience of cancer, or are just in need of renewed inspiration to continue the fight, browse through some of what the cancer survivors in the Cayman Islands have to say. If you would like to submit your own survivor's story, or testimonial of how the Cancer Society has helped you, please e-mail

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Heather Lockhart, ACC-ICF

*The Thrive Mindset - STAYING POSITIVE IN TOUGH TIMES.* Heather shares her journey and success strategies for staying positive.

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Jerry Frazier

*As Presented at the 2015 Survivors' Dinner* Life Is A Gift Tony Robbins once said, "Life is a gift, and it offers us the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to give something back by becoming more."



This year, the Cancer Society held their annual survivors dinner under the theme “Life Is A Gift.” Many anticipated survivors gathered to celebrate yet another year of life filled with an abundance of privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities to give something back by becoming more.” This “becoming more” phrase involved, ‘becoming more thankful, becoming more appreciative and enjoying life as a gift.’

This is the story of Jerry Frazier’s LIFE as a GIFT.

“Time and time again, we hear about people being diagnosed with cancer and the common misconception that many people have is that rarely do people become a cancer survivor. I have always heard about people fighting cancer, but never did I ever imagine that I would be someone who would be diagnosed with cancer and even become a cancer survivor. I had a pretty normal life. My days were spent managing our rental property full time and part time as a Facilities Manager at our church. I enjoyed hobbies such as snorkeling, fishing and spending time on the beach with my family. I worked out at the gym three days a week for many years and ate mostly healthy food. This was my regular routine until one day I had a tragic turn.

One morning in January of 2002 while shaving, I noticed a lump on the left side of my throat. Curious and somewhat anxious, I went to my General Practitioner (GP) who then started me on a course of antibiotics. I was feeling hopeful, but unfortunately, the lump did not go away and so he tried a different course of antibiotics. Sadly, months went by and the lump was still there. Finally, in June of 2002 I went to my dentist for my routine 6 months cleaning. When I opened my mouth for the Hygienist she exclaimed, “Oh my God what’s that?” She gave me a mirror to look in my mouth and I saw the ugliest deformed mass of whatever was in the back of my throat. I went back to my GP who sent me for an ultrasound and the results were sent to an ENT in Miami. I flew to Miami where the ENT took a biopsy of the mass on my tonsil and within minutes he came back with the results... cancer!

Up until then, the only symptom I had was the visible lump on my throat. The initial thought that flashed through my mind when the doctor said that I have cancer was; “I’m going to die! I’m too busy to be sick. I don’t have time for this.” It seemed as if the ENT could read my thoughts because upon analyzing the horrific and disappointing look on my face, he assured me that my survival rate was 95% and that I was not going to die. Immediately, I had a change of heart and mind and I adapted a positive and optimistic outlook on the situation. I accepted that I needed to be in Miami for several months of treatment. At the time of diagnosis, I had been following Jesus for 7 years and it shook my faith to hear that I had cancer. One likes to believe that if you are a Christian nothing bad will ever happen to you. This is simply not the case, as we all experience sickness and death in our flesh bodies at



some point in our lives. Through prayer and praise to God all areas of my life improved as I underwent treatment. Without my wife, children, parents, brothers, nephews, nieces, close friends and many church family members caring for me, counseling me, visiting me and praying for my survival, I would have suffered more pain and anguish than what I was going through.

Following diagnosis, I immediately took the initiative to start drinking and eating more healthy foods and taking vitamin C supplements. Friends were suggesting many other remedies, but after consulting my radiologist and oncologist, they both said my cancer was too aggressive and advanced for alternative treatments and that my best option for survival was radiation and chemotherapy for 6 weeks.

As abovementioned, I was greatly blessed with the support from my immediate and extended family, my friends and prayer groups from many churches in many countries around the world! I felt so loved, blessed and encouraged that I was ready to go through treatment. However, I did not know what radiation therapy and chemotherapy were, so my Social worker at the hospital where I was going to be treated gave my name and number to a man about my age, with the same diagnosis that had recently completed treatment. He called me and explained the procedure that he went through and what I could expect. Knowing this, cut my anxiety in half! Though my anxiety was decreased knowing these things, I wish I was advised to exercise my arms and legs daily so as to maintain strength in my limbs. Similarly, being told to have a physiotherapist show me exercises that I could do throughout my treatment to minimize the effect that the radiation would have on my ability to open my mouth fully, would have also been beneficial.

I am so blessed to be a cancer survivor. My advice to anyone who is newly diagnosed with cancer is that you have your name placed on prayer lists so that many will be praying for you to survive according to God's Will and that His presence will be with you throughout your treatment. Secondly, get advice from others who have recently completed treatment of a similar diagnosis so that you will know what to expect. Also, do not be too surprised if you find out that your health insurance does not cover cancer treatment. That was something that I wish I knew before I was diagnosed.

My outlook on life has changed since my cancer diagnosis and survival. I owe it all to God and my cancer diagnosis for this drastic change in my outlook on life. Every day is a gift, so be thankful for each day. No matter what you are going through, there is always someone else going through something worse, so be encouraged and pray for others who are suffering or grieving. Love each other deeply." [back to top](#)

## Marlene Smith

*As published in the Cayman Reporter July 18, 2014* Marlene With faith and humour she survived The Lions Club of Grand Cayman recently organised the 3rd Annual Delano Hislop 3 Day Journey for Life walk/run event. This event not only raises funds for men afflicted with prostate and colon cancers but also seeks to raise awareness of the disease.

It was during a frank discussion with someone at the walk that I realised there are still individuals who are not aware that colorectal cancer affects an equal number of men and women. Many women, however, think of colorectal cancer (CRC) as a disease only affecting men and may be unaware of important information about screening and preventing CRC that could save their lives. Marlene Smith a cancer survivor shares her story.



Marlene Smith is a vivacious and attractive fifty something Canadian who has been coming to the islands since 1989 and has made her home in North Side. During a routine colonoscopy she had polyps removed but her surgeon did not seem too concerned and reminded her to schedule another in three years' time.

It was May 2010 and she had just returned home from Cayman. She booked an appointment with a new doctor; as her usual doctor was preparing to retire. During her consultation he inquired about her last colonoscopy. Since polyps had been discovered and removed during her last colonoscopy, he requested that she did another.

"Well, I procrastinated," Marlene said. "Not that the actual colonoscopy is painful-you do not feel or remember a thing. It is mainly the prep work and inconvenience the day before." The months flew by and finally by November she could not put it off any longer and finally booked the appointment.

As she was waking from the anesthesia, her doctor informed her that he had removed some polyps and had taken a biopsy of a tumor he had discovered. The results would come back in two weeks. "Since he was not pleased with what he saw, he sent it on to a cancer clinic for more testing and brought it to the attention of Dr Simunovic a colorectal surgical oncologist. He concluded that in the New Year, the tumor should be removed," Marlene said.

On January 6, 2011 Marlene went in as an outpatient, the surgery was done and she went home to wait for the results. Four days after returning to Cayman she received a phone call directly from her surgeon telling her the tumor was malignant and he wanted to operate in the next 2-3 weeks. "When I heard the news that I had stage 1 colorectal cancer, I was numb! I literally walked around in shock mode for 3 days crying at all times of the day or night."

"Finally, I realised that I needed to get a grip on things and start thinking positive thoughts," Marlene said. She began telling all her friends in Cayman what she was about to undergo and that in two weeks she would have to return to Canada and have surgery.

Marlene's surgery was a success despite the pain and waking with an ileostomy bag. "Prior to surgery, I knew I would get an ostomy bag and when I met her, I named her Maxine. She went everywhere with me! Fortunately, the airlines did not charge me for "extra baggage" when I flew. I had to find humour in this somewhere," quipped Marlene.

"If it had not been for all my friends here in Cayman rallying to keep me busy so that I had no time to think about it I do not believe I could have done it without them. All their thoughts,



concerns and words of encouragement before, during and after my surgery enabled me to be positive throughout the entire ordeal. Emails and phone calls continued, all inquiring as to how “Maxine” and I were coping.”

Two weeks after her surgery, the call came in that she had been dreading. The news was good though! Her surgeon had been successful in removing the entire cancerous tumor. “He told me I would not need chemo or radiation. I cried tears of happiness,” said Marlene. The road to recovery was a long one, but Marlene feels she had been blessed. Nine weeks after surgery, she returned to Cayman to continue resting and healing.

“Four months with Maxine was definitely a learning experience, however again I was fortunate to be able to return home and have the reversal surgery done. That is where they remove the ostomy bag and reattach my intestines to the bowels. Teaching the bowels to start working again after being shut down for four months is a long, slow, healing process. It took six months to a year. Each month is better than the one before,” Marlene said.

Marlene is back to being active. She works out at the gym and does everything she once did before. Discovering that she had early stages of colorectal cancer and beating it gave her a whole new outlook on life. “Life is way too short and I do not take people or things for granted anymore. I continue to try and think positive thoughts even if I am having a bad day,” Marlene said. She encourages everyone over the age of 50 to get checked by their doctor for colon cancer. She added, “If you cannot do it for yourself, do it for those that you love. I am a survivor and you could be too if it gets caught in time. Like the old saying, “Don’t put off tomorrow what you can do today”. It could save your life.” [back to top](#)

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## Anthony Walton

“I don’t have the time.” “It’s too expensive.” “I’m afraid of what I might find out.” “I’m fine.” “It’s no big deal, I’ll tough it out.” If you are a wife, girlfriend, mother, sister, daughter friend or loved one of a man who refuses to see a doctor, these are some of the excuses you may have heard from him for avoiding a medical check-up. Unfortunately however studies have shown that men die at higher rates than women for all the leading causes of death and that men “live sicker and die younger than women.” So the time has come for men to make the time, cough up the money and “man up” to the reality that they need to be more proactive about their health.

Mr. Anthony Walton, a 53 year old carpenter in Cayman Brac and local prostate cancer survivor, learned this lesson the hard way. Approximately four years ago, Mr. Anthony went to the hospital simply to obtain a refill for his medication. His doctor, however, told him that before he could do so Mr. Anthony would first need to do some tests and referred him to Dr. Backman, a urologist. The results of his PSA blood test (17) and the digital rectal exam (a lump) both pointed to the fact that cancer might be present in his prostate. A biopsy was performed, confirming suspicions of cancer. A year after his diagnosis Mr. Anthony began treatment, choosing to have radiation treatment in Jamaica instead of the US.

Mr. Anthony indicates that although he was a little worried after receiving this diagnosis, he was not scared because the doctor reassured him that the cancer was very small and growing very slowly. He spoke of his diagnosis to his wife, father and brothers and felt much supported. In the end however, he put his faith in the doctor’s hands.

When asked about his family history, Mr. Anthony revealed that at least two people in his family, one on his mother’s and one on his father’s side, had prostate cancer. Given his risk factors, it was surprising to find out that Mr. Anthony waited until he was nearly 50 years old to screen for prostate cancer, and only did so as a condition of having his medication refilled. Due to the fact that he had never seen too many doctors and wasn’t having regular check-ups, Mr. Anthony had never heard about the PSA blood test before. He had, however, heard and read about prostate cancer off and on in the newspapers, radio and TV but never took it too seriously. Today, his attitude has changed – Mr. Anthony now sees the doctor on a regular basis and does a PSA blood test every four months. He also has a message for the men of our islands “I would say they should get a physical once a year or so. They also need to know that the statistic shows that about 1 man in 6 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime”

Still, Mr. Anthony was very fortunate because his cancer was found early and his radiation



treatment, which lasted approximately 3 ½ months, did not result in severe side effects. At the moment his PSA level is down to two (2) and the doctor assures him that everything looks okay.

Although Mr. Anthony's success story is inspiring, not all men are so fortunate. The Cayman Islands Cancer Society is observing November as male cancers awareness month and throughout the next few weeks will be submitting articles with basic information on prostate and testicular cancers that all men should know. [back to top](#)

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### Samantha Widmer

The Widmer's, widely known as the "golfing" family of the Cayman Islands, are a very close knit family that spend a lot of time travelling and competing together. Twenty-four year old



Samantha Widmer is known as one of Cayman's most motivated and talented young women. She has won the prestigious title of Top Female Golfer in the Caribbean and was recently a Young Caymanian Leadership Award Finalist.

Having encouraging and supporting parents, like Peter and Susan Widmer, was a source of strength for Samantha and her two younger brothers, Johnny and Jack. However, nothing could have prepared them for the shocking news... that their own mother had stage four colon cancer.

Married for 35 years, fifty-four year old Sue Widmer was the picture of good health. Head of the Art Department at the Cayman Prep & High School and also a local artist/ costume maker, Sue began to feel fatigued from work and other activities. Persistent fatigue is one of the most commonly experienced cancer symptoms. It occurs early in certain cancers such as colon or stomach and is usually more common when the cancer is advanced. Anemia, associated with many types of cancer, especially types affecting the bowel, is frequently the culprit. Fatigue is a symptom of both malignant and non-malignant conditions and should be evaluated by a physician.

Sue's loss of energy and some issues with her bowel prompted her to visit her doctor. Being that she was healthy, not overweight and feeling slightly sluggish, she thought her trip to the clinic would be routine. Her doctor requested that she did a sleuth of blood tests including a CA125. A CA-125 (cancer antigen 125) is used as a tumor marker, which means the test can help show if some types of cancer are present. Sue's doctor called Samantha and asked her to attend the doctor visit to find out the test results. When Sue returned to her doctor for the test results her CA125 marker was high.

Having had no family history of cancer, the family was left bewildered. How could this have happened when Sue's dad was still alive at the ripe old age of 88 years? Sadly, most colon cancer cases are not related to genetics or family history; they just occur sporadically. Sue was still in shock and saddened by the news, but was very determined to "get rid of it" and move on with her life.

Pete and Sue were directed to a doctor that specialized in chemotherapy for colon cancers. It was determined that it would be best to shrink the tumors and then have an operation to remove them once they were small enough to be contained. Surgery can only take place after chemotherapy, and not before, unless a number of weeks are separating the two procedures. If effective, the chemotherapy not only kills the cancer cells, but also the healthy cells in the body, which can lead to additional complications.

Even though Sue was weak and tired, she felt it was necessary to financially support her family so she worked through her entire nine months of chemotherapy; fighting through tummy aches and nausea during the school day. Nausea affects around half of all people being treated with chemotherapy, which can cause the normal wave-like action that moves stool through the bowel to be faster or slower than usual. When the action is faster, the stool is less formed and can cause cramping and/or diarrhea. On the other hand, a slower action may cause stool to travel slower, becoming harder and dryer and more difficult to pass. This may contribute to constipation resulting in achy or cramp-like feelings likely associated with increased flatulence (gas). Chemotherapy may also alter the normal bacterial flora that is present in the intestines. This can affect digestion and cause abdominal pain, cramping or flatulence.

Sue battled through two years of several operations, tests, chemotherapy and living in a hospital. The chemotherapy was effective at shrinking the cancer tumors and so surgery was the next step to remove the cancer. She had many highs and lows, which were draining on the entire family as they watched her endure this ordeal. In spite of all this, Sue kept a smile on her face which caused the nurses and doctors to call her, “the woman with the most hope and determination. Her love for life and her family was extraordinary.” Having a loving husband and kids made her feel supported during this terrible time.

The teachers and students at Cayman Prep were very supportive and often stopped in at the hospital to spend time with their beloved teacher. This lifted her spirits and gave the Widmer family some much needed rest away from the hospital. The family would split visitation times so that Sue would always have someone with her. Samantha would go during the mornings and afternoons, which provided an opportunity for her to develop a stronger bond with her mom. Peter, the devoted husband, would be there at nights to tuck his wife into bed and make sure she always felt the endearing love he had for her. Everyone tried to make Sue’s experience as realistic as it would be at home. Sue was determined to keep going on with her everyday life and keep her spirit alive.

Sue recovered from the chemotherapy and had a very lengthy, but successful surgery by an amazing doctor out of the Bahamas. He was a ‘dream come true’ for the family that did not know whether such a meticulous and difficult surgery could take place. After spending a number of months out of hospital and returning to her full time job, Sue experience a second wave of complications which put her back in hospital. After a large ileostomy (unheard of to many medical experts), additional surgeries due to blocked intestine and over six months in full-time hospital care, Sue’s body was tired and eventually lead to her passing in June 2011.

For Sam it has been a very tough experience losing her mom. There are days when she



misses her a lot but due to the strong family bond, they all continue to encourage each other to stay positive. Sam has made a real effort to support her dad and brothers because as she states, "Men tend to keep feelings inside and it is very important to listen to their feelings and concerns. We spend time doing things together as a family and have become a great support system for one another. Even though Mum will not be with me when I am married and I have my own children, I know the legacy she left behind will live on through us and she will be by our sides each step of the way. The time I got to spend with my Mum during those last few months was priceless and something that will be a constant reminder of her determination and passion for life."

### Sam's Advice to Everyone

I want everyone to know that cancer can affect anyone, at any time. Good genetics and

feeling healthy does not make you any less likely to experience cancer at some point in your lifetime. It is very important to have regular checkups and blood tests done to catch problems before they escalate. A few points that I have learned from the experience are: (1) many mother's become so involved with their kid's lives that they forget about taking time to make sure they are healthy and strong; (2) if a family member does experience an illness such as cancer, it is vital that you ask all the unanswered questions or bring up uncomfortable topics up for discussion because there may not be another opportunity; (3) never give up hope in the amazing doctors and nurses that dedicate themselves to saving lives; (4) Research – just because your hospital or doctor has limited knowledge on an issue, doesn't mean you have to. Write to hospitals, doctors and other medical facilities to see if they specialize in any of the issues your family member is facing. Spread the word on social media sites or reach out to old friends that may be able to assist in finding doctors or raising funds.

Given that 3 out of 4 colon cancer cases occur in people with no known genetic cause or family history, colon cancer screening should be a priority for every adult. The American Cancer Society (ACS) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that both men and women at average risk of developing colorectal cancer (i.e. no family history and few, if any, other risk factors) begin screening for colorectal cancer soon after turning 50, then continue getting screened at regular intervals.

If that doesn't convince you to take action now, then consider this. The five-year survival rate for people, who are detected with colon cancer in the earliest stages, when it is still confined to the colon, is over 90%. If cancer has metastasized (spread) beyond the colon to other distant areas in the body, five-year survival falls to an alarming 9.8%.

From these statistics, it is evident why colon cancer screening saves lives. Regular screening can find colon cancer early, when treatment is most effective and gives a chance of a longer life. Talk to your doctor about scheduling screening as soon as possible.

The Cayman Islands Cancer Society is dedicated to increasing the level of awareness of everyone on the various ways of preventing colorectal cancer through presentations. These are offered free of cost to companies and their employees, schools, clubs and church groups. If you wish to schedule a presentation or need to find out more about screening methods and/or risk factors call Victoria on 949-7618. [back to top](#)

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## HPV: De-stigmatising Prevention

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is now a well-established cause of cervical cancer and there is growing evidence of HPV being a relevant factor in other anogenital cancers (anus, vulva, vagina and penis) and head and neck cancers. Of over 100 different types of HPV, two (types 16 and 18) are responsible for about 70% of all cervical cancer cases worldwide. (*World Health Organization's Human Papillomavirus and Related Cancers Summary Report - June 22, 2010*)

HPV has gained notoriety not only for the damage which it can wreak on the lives of women of all ages, but strangely enough via one of the most effective methods of prevention currently available in the fight against a number of potential diseases and illnesses: vaccination.

The first preventative HPV vaccine, Gardasil, was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2006. Since then, the vaccine has been surrounded by misinformation and controversy as conservative groups have expressed tremendous concern over the vaccine giving young women the wrong message about being sexually active. In other words, their argument has been that it will encourage young girls who are vaccinated to have multiple sex partners and engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour.

Lisa Smith (name changed to protect privacy), a young Caymanian who had to face the reality of having HPV and stage one cervical cancer at the age of 16, has a very different message.

"I was really fortunate in having the type of relationship with my mom where I could talk openly with her about things like being sexually active, and having her help me in being responsible about it," she begins. In fact, it was her mom who took her to the gynecologist from an early age, where she had her first Pap test done and was put on birth control prior to becoming sexually active at the age of 16.

A pap test is a simple and quick procedure that is performed by a doctor, or gynecologist.

During the test, an instrument called a speculum is gently inserted into the vagina. This allows the cervix (the neck of the womb) to be clearly seen. A small spatula or a tiny brush is then inserted to collect cells from the cervix. These cells are smeared onto a glass and a slide and sent to a laboratory for analysis. Pap tests can be uncomfortable but should not hurt.

Lisa and her boyfriend were in a relationship for 18 months, during which time she was being exclusive and having protected sex. In other words, she had only had **one** sexual partner

when she was diagnosed. One day she noticed that she had developed genital warts, and went straight to the doctor to get a Pap smear done. The results of the test showed that she had abnormal cells and she was asked to come back for follow up exams.

“When they told me I had abnormal cells my first reaction was ‘what does that even mean?’. They explained it to me, but the truth is you don’t really comprehend it at first, and it takes a few days for the reality to set in. It took a week for me to really start to understand what was going on with me,” she explains.

Once she was able to wrap her brain around the virus, the upcoming procedures and what they would entail, the emotional stress began to set in.

“It was just... it was really heart wrenching,” she recalls. After finding out, Lisa was having a hard time concentrating at school. “It’s the kind of thing that will be going through your mind, because you don’t know if it’s going to develop into anything or not. I remember being in the bathroom stall [at school] and having girls in there helping me, holding my hand, and I would start crying. It was really terrible. It was really emotional to think that I might develop cancer, especially at that age, all because I didn’t know.”

Fortunately Lisa was able to rely on the support of her friends, family and boyfriend to not only get her through the procedures, but also to help her kick her smoking habit. “I was a young, dumb teenager, smoking cigarettes,” she admits. “I didn’t realize that by smoking and being on birth control I was speeding up the reactions my body was having to the virus and essentially making it easier for the cancer to grow.”

HPV can also be dangerous to an individual if there is a previous history of STD’s (Chlamydia, herpes simplex virus type 2 etc.) and those with compromised immune system (including lupus, HIV/AIDS) are also at risk for cervical cancer.

Lisa underwent cryosurgery, where the doctor takes samples from the uterus and uses a “freezing process” of the uterus which is aimed at killing the abnormal cells. “It was a very dramatic moment for me,” she says.

Following the procedure, Lisa went back to her gynaecologist to get the HPV vaccine, as she can still benefit from the vaccine even though she has been exposed to the virus already. “Some girls think that the HPV vaccine is like other vaccines, meaning that once you get vaccinated you get the virus. That is not true. It’s ignorance on their part,” she explains.

Six years later Lisa remains as committed to her own sexual health as she was when she was

16. She continues to have a pap smear done every six months and asks specifically to be checked for abnormal cells. She's also taking advantage of the advancements being made as far as the HPV vaccine is concerned: "The vaccine has just been approved for boys and men, so I'm sending my boyfriend to get vaccinated," she declares.

There is still no HPV testing for men, which means that male partners who have the virus may be spreading it to their female companions without knowing that they are infected.

According to the National Cervical Cancer Coalition, some doctors think HPV is almost as common as the common cold virus. While it may be an unfair burden for women to bear, it is a reality and at the end of the day taking good care of oneself should be the most important priority in each girl's life- no matter how difficult that may be for parents and other adults to accept.

"I really want girls to be more open minded to the vaccine, and I want mothers specially to be more open minded to it. Mothers think that, because they try to talk their girls out of having sex by not putting them on the pill or by not letting them have access to condoms they are preventing something from actually happening, but what they don't know is that these things are going to happen regardless. Especially since sex is one of the main reasons that girls actually get HPV. So honestly, mothers, above all others, should be more open minded about getting their girls vaccinated and using condoms."

Most people who have ever experienced intimate sexual contact with another person will have been exposed to this virus and will have had an "active" HPV infection at some point in their lives. For most people, the body's immune system kicks into action and the infection is eliminated from the body often without the infected person ever knowing they had the virus. In a few people, sometimes because their immune system is otherwise compromised, the virus persists and remains. It is in persons with persistent HPV infections that cancer can develop, often 10 - 20 years after the initial infection.

## How do I know if I have HPV?

As HPV is usually asymptomatic, most people will never know they have it. If the HPV does not go away on its own, it can cause changes in the cervix cells which will usually show up on your Pap test. If you have the strain of the virus that causes genital warts you or someone else may notice small, flat or rounded bumps on, around or inside your sex organs.

## What are the risk factors for HPV?

- Early onset of sexual activity
- Having multiple sexual partners over the course of your lifetime
- Having partners who have had multiple partners over their lifetime.



Women can substantially lower their risk of exposure to HPV by abstaining from initial sexual contact for as long as possible and remaining in a monogamous relationship. Additionally, avoiding tobacco products will reduce the likelihood that an HPV infection will develop into cancer. Women can also lower their risk by having a Pap smear on a regular basis – at least once every two years to three years (or more frequently if recommended by a doctor) and getting vaccinated.

### What is the HPV vaccine?

There are over 100 strains of HPV. The two vaccines (Gardasil and Cervarix) are designed to protect against the two types of HPV that can cause 70% of the cases of cervical cancer. They do not protect you against all other types, so you will still need to have a Pap test every two years from whenever you become sexually active or turn 21. Your doctor will let you



know if you need to have more frequent Pap smears. Gardasil also offers protection against the two strains of HPV that cause 90% of all cases of genital warts. Neither vaccine offers protection against other sexually transmitted infections.

### Who should get the vaccine?

Gardasil is approved for use in females and males between the ages of 9 and 26. Cervarix is approved for girls and women between the ages of 10 and 25. To get the full protection offered by the vaccines it should be administered before one engages in any intimate sexual contact.

### What if I have already experienced intimate sexual contact?

If you have already had sexual contact you may have been exposed to one of the four strains of the virus that the vaccine protects against. Therefore you may not have the full protective benefit of the vaccine. However, it is recommended that if you are 26 years of age or younger, you should still take the Gardasil vaccine as it is unlikely that you will have been infected with all four strains of the virus that the vaccine offers protection against and so will still have some protection.

### How is the vaccine given?

You will need three injections over a period of six months to get the best protection. A doctor or nurse will give you the injection in your upper arm or thigh. You will receive the 2<sup>nd</sup>



injection two months after the first one and the 3<sup>rd</sup> injection six months after the first one. It is important that the doctor or nurse giving you the injection know about any allergies or medical conditions you may suffer from. In August of 2009 the Cancer Society, in partnership with HSA, launched a program to distribute free vaccinations to girls aged 11-17 at the Public Health Department in the Cayman Islands Hospital. This vaccine is also available at some paediatricians, gynaecologists and general practitioners; who have partnered with the Cancer Society to make the price more reasonable and easily accessible to people. Physicians in this initiative are: Dr. Abraham, Dr Addleson, Dr. Cridland, Dr. Christofferson, Dr. El-Madany, Dr. Charles, Dr. Hobday, Dr. Meggs, Dr. Pomares, Dr. Richmond-Peck, Dr. Richens, Dr. Richter, Dr. Smith, Dr. Vivek and Dr. Sook Yin. For more information on the Cancer Society's HPV programme, gynaecological cancers or on activities year round call 949-7618 or email [back to top](#)

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Testimonials

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## Barbara Edwards

“When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in June, 2006, I felt despaired and didn’t want to live. That’s when I was introduced to the Cancer Society. Every Tuesday I would see Miss Alex, the counselor. Miss Alex has been there for me at all times; she would even visit me on weekends. I fondly remember when she brought me wigs when my hair fell out. The Cancer Society even gave me prosthetic breasts.

“Two years ago the cancer spread to my bladder and this really took a toll on me financially. Although I do my bit of sewing, at times it gets rough. The Cancer Society has been a tower of strength with financial support. I am not sure what I would do without the Cancer Society; they have been involved throughout my entire diagnosis. Cancer is devastating but if you have support, like what I got from the Cancer Society it makes it much easier to cope.” [back to top](#)

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## Ruby Myles

“When I found out I had cancer, I went to the Cayman Islands Cancer Society and was able to qualify for financial assistance to cover my chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Everything I needed to help me with my cancer treatment, the Cancer Society provided. I am so blessed to be alive today. “I can’t thank the Cancer Society enough. They are always there for me. Whenever I can, I give back to the Society’s boxes that are in stores and supermarkets. I do my part to help them to help someone else. I love these people.” [back to top](#)

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## Rosie Lewis

“We all know that any charity does good work – so why would the Cayman Islands Cancer

## Society be any different?

“The difference is the personal approach and the length that the Cancer Society here in Cayman goes to support it’s ‘members’. ”

I had the misfortune to become one of its ‘members’ back in 2004 when I was diagnosed with lung cancer, but it was and is an experience that continues to change my life. Far from supplying just practical advice which you would expect I was surprised at how in depth their support is and continues to be. They managed to make me feel that they genuinely cared about me and my story and their help far outweighed my expectations.

“The whole ethos of the C.I.C.S. is that everyone here in cayman should have access to affordable treatment for cancer should they need it, regardless of their insurance cover. Like so many people my insurance cover was not sufficient for the cost of major surgery in Miami and chemotherapy and ongoing treatments and checks. Their support extends to financially paying for peoples flights, accommodation and medical bills etc, and in many cases booking these things and ensuring that they have all the documents etc they need. They have some amazing counselors that donate their time for cancer patients and survivors because cancer is a long journey and we do need some help sometimes. Every now and then someone from the Society will call me and just ask how I am doing – such is their continued support and care.

“To me the Cayman Islands Cancer Society is not just a charity – they are my extended family, my friends who care about me and what is going on in my life and I feel so fortunate to be part of the group. They have helped me and so may others so much – they really do need our continued support so they may continue this incredible job that they do for others in the future. For many it is the difference in maybe having or not having the treatment that will save their life and no-one should have to make that decision should they?” [back to top](#)

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## Donna Parsons

“My husband had a brain haemorrhage a few months ago that required him to be air-ambulanced to Miami. He had two emergency surgeries which left him unable to take care of himself or walk on his own. After some initial progress he unfortunately had a relapse and was paralysed from the neck down, unable to eat, and required rehospitalisation.

“When he was able to return home, our usual bed posed a big problem – trying to get him to sit up was such a task. I just kept saying ‘I wish we had a hospital bed’. At first I thought we would have to buy a bed because the hospital did not provide aftercare services, and finding another way to get a bed was extremely difficult. Eventually we got a referral to the Cancer Society, where we were informed we could rent a bed temporarily for a minimal fee.

“Since I have had the bed it has been such a saviour for us; it was so much easier with the hospital bed to change and feed him, and roll him over when we needed to. Initially I was so overwhelmed with how I would take care of him at home, constantly asking ‘how do I do this and that’? After getting help from the Cancer Society I didn’t have to worry about those details anymore – they even had someone come to deliver and set up the bed for us. If it wasn’t for getting assistance from the Cancer Society, I don’t know what we would have done. This bed was such a help financially, and with reducing the stress of my husband’s illness. I was so thrilled with the service that once we returned the bed I donated the rental deposit back to the Cancer Society to support this programme. Now my husband is on the road to recovery and I know the Cancer Society’s equipment rental played a big role in that.”

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