

## Working through cancer

A person is considered a cancer survivor from the minute he or she is diagnosed with the disease. Staying at work during treatment or going back to work after treatment can pose challenges along with fighting the disease.

Employers are required to support a survivor's decision to work, said Teri Hoenemeyer, director of education and supportive services at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"Cancer is classified as a disability, and working survivors have protections and rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act, so employers will need to provide time for doctors' appointments and treatments that may go above and beyond Family Medical Leave," she said.

Whether it's a work colleague, family member, or yourself, this advice may help, say survivors:

- Take it all in one bit at a time—one day, one treatment, one surgery, one radiation.
- Though it can be difficult, stay positive.
- Understand that cancer will take away your hair, your energy, and control of your schedule, but it will give back many new things such as supportive friends and coworkers, notes of encouragement, and a new outlook on life.

Hoenemeyer said once back in the workplace following a diagnosis, survivors must take special care of themselves.

"Extra rest, a healthy diet, physical activity, and low stress are all important factors to the survivor at work," Hoenemeyer said. "Take time out of the day to do something that focuses on managing stress and anxiety; it could be meditation, sitting still with some music or taking a walk."