

Debra W. is a youthful, middle-aged, married woman who very recently received a non-operable lymphoma diagnosis. Around the same time, her husband also received a lymphoma diagnosis, which in contrast can be treated surgically, and they are both in the planning stages of their care with the same oncologist. I met with Debra in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of her unique values, desires, and concerns around her care to aid with the provision of dignity-affirming, patient-centered care throughout her treatment process. Debra explained to me that she prefers to be addressed by her full first name, and expressed that this was important for her treatment team to know.

When asked what else would be important for her treatment team to know about her as a person, Debra first identified that she is a voracious reader, often with several books on the go at once, picking up one or another as suits her mood or the setting at the time. She seems to approach life in a similar manner, with “lots of stuff to be done” and people in her life to take care of, especially her four children, but also her large and deeply connected extended family who live locally as well. Family is extremely important to Debra and she would appreciate having her family present and involved in her care, especially when treatment providers are communicating important information about her treatment process. She is concerned she may not always fully process the information as it is delivered and is hopeful her family would be able to help her keep track of everything that is communicated. She noted she is somewhat fearful of finding herself on her own at times through her treatment process (e.g., during overnight hospital admissions). However, she was open to the use of technology to help her stay connected to her family when they are unable to be with her in person.

Debra is also a big nature lover and an avid competitive cyclist, though she explained she loves the sense of community cycling affords her more than the competitive aspect. She values being outside in nature and expressed concerns about being stuck inside for extended periods while she pursues treatment. She also let me know she worries about missing out on important family events and activities, and that being able to enjoy life as normally as possible when she is able will be important to her throughout her treatment process; she doesn't want cancer to be the focus of her life. At the same time, she is concerned about her prognosis, particularly because of her husband's diagnosis, and the frightening possibility that her children may be left without parents to care for them in the future. In terms of her broader faith-based beliefs, Debra identified that she does believe in god or a higher power of some sort, but is not particularly religious or attached to a faith-based community. She expressed a belief that things tend to happen for a reason, though we did not explore this in great detail.

In sum, Debra is a family-oriented, active, and outdoorsy woman who is hoping she will still be able to retain some sense of normalcy in her life as she and her husband proceed through their respective lymphoma-related treatments. The support of her family and connection with community, in addition to genuine connection with and care from her treatment providers, will be important in providing her with the dignity-affirming patient-centered care she both desires and deserves. It was a pleasure to get to know Debra and be involved in her care.