**WE NEED TO EMPOWER OURSELVES ABOUT BLOOD CANCERS**

 Did you know, Cancer is not only found in your lung, prostate or breast? Cancer is also found in your blood. There are many types of blood cancers. In this article, we are speaking about the blood cancer, Multiple Myeloma. The Philadelphia Multiple Myeloma Networking Group (PMMNG) provides Support, Resources and Education to patients and their families. We are a racially diverse group that has members who join our zoom meetings from across the country. We all have individual multiple myeloma stories of discovery, treatment and access to healthcare. The PMMNG is actively trying to spread awareness, knowledge and education.

Multiple Myeloma is the most common blood cancer in African Americans, who are almost twice as likely as Caucasians to develop it. And the incidence is growing… African Americans make up roughly 24% of the newly diagnosed MM patients, despite being only 12%-13% of the entire USA population. *American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts and Figures for African Americans* 2019-2021.

The PMMNG group meets the 2nd Saturday of every month via zoom. We have presentations by doctors, nurses and social workers from The Abramson Cancer Center at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (HUP). These medical professionals are nationally recognized as the best in their field. The Oncologists speak to us about the latest treatment options, dealing with life as a cancer patient, drug side effects, clinical trials and more. The social workers provide presentations on Health Insurance Coverage and understanding the different options for Medicare. The members have the opportunity to talk to one another in small groups to share personal experiences. The group welcomes and encourages family members and care partners to join. Our website is found at philadelphia.myeloma.org.

Better access to healthcare can be achieved through awareness of available resources. If African American Myeloma patients are provided equal treatment modalities with those given to Caucasians, they actually do better, and live longer and healthier lives. The PMMNG is connected to The Health Tree Foundation, International Myeloma Foundation (IMF), Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation (MMRF), Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS) and many more. The organizations are here to provide information and assistance when you do not know the answers. No question is too small or too big, too simple or too confusing. Having a cancer diagnosis is scary. It is helpful to know that someone is experiencing it along with you. The path has been paved. The answers are there for questions ranging from finding a doctor to helping find financial assistance for medications. The PMMNG is one resource that can give you access to so much more. The more educated you become about your health – The Healthier you will be. Information is available at philadelphia.myeloma.org.

If you are a person whose blood-work reveals one or all of the following: elevated calcium and/or elevated protein, impaired kidney function, and anemia, you need to be evaluated by an Oncologist who specializes in treatment of Multiple Myeloma. You might also have chronic bone pain in a certain area of the body, constant fatigue, decrease in energy, and/or a sudden broken bone. Any of the above symptoms can have multiple causes. However, in our cases, these symptoms are all signs of our Multiple Myeloma cancer. Too often, lack of knowledge and limited access to a skilled healthcare provider will determine whether you are offered a blood test. The blood test is needed to confirm the presence of a blood cancer and start the process of determining the optimal treatment for you.

There is help and hope for you and your loved ones. It is time to ask questions. And, most importantly it is time for all of us to have access to proper health care. Modern medicine is always researching and discovering medications and other treatments. The group is here for you and is willing to support you on your journey. For more information on the PMMNG visit philadelphia.myeloma.org KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!