



# Cancer Illuminated: Transforming Communications in the Workplace

## ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

FOURTH & MADISON CONFERENCE CENTER | SEATTLE, WA  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2019 | 9:00 AM – 12:30 PM

## INTRODUCTION

Cancer Pathways hosted a roundtable discussion and presentations for *Cancer Illuminated: Transforming Communications in the Workplace* in Seattle on November 7, 2019. This report summarizes the content presented and discussed.

Roundtable participants attended to learn more about the impact of cancer on employers and employees, and to discuss practices that can enhance cancer awareness at work. Participants were:

- Subject matter experts, including executives, managers, legal experts, policy experts, healthcare professionals and social workers, human resources specialists, and working caregivers and survivors
- From businesses of all sizes with a range of perspectives, benefits, and HR offerings
- From a variety of industries, including pharmaceuticals, aerospace, business association, State Senate, law offices, public affairs & marketing, technology, healthcare & research, architecture, public transit, electrician, nonprofit, and patient advocacy.

Cancer Pathways understands that the topic of cancer in the workplace is complex. Communication can be complicated and difficult, but crucial to the health of businesses and people. Managers, HR professionals, and colleagues report feeling unequipped to best support cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers in the workplace setting. Likewise, those impacted by cancer often feel isolated and unclear as to what resources in the workplace are available.

Clearly, this is an issue with many unanswered questions. To begin developing answers to these questions, Cancer Pathways hosted the *Cancer Illuminated* roundtable. The objective of the roundtable was to gather input from subject matter experts and stakeholders to identify gaps and explore practices that can raise awareness to enhance workplace culture for employers and employees impacted by cancer. Roundtable findings inform Cancer Pathways' role and programs accordingly.

This report summarizes the roundtable discussions and topics covered by speakers

## SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

### Topics Presented

Realities of survivorship and caregiving (physical, social, emotional, and mental long term and late effects)	Research updates on workplace practices related to cancer survivors and caregivers	Cancer as a disability, from a policy standpoint	Reasonable accommodations
Examples of successful company practices to accommodate and support employees with cancer	Implementation and policies surrounding new Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave	Legal tips for employees and employers impacted by cancer	Navigating company benefits and arrangements for cancer

## Discussion Questions

What gaps have you seen in the workplace that need to be addressed?

How does a workplace go about discussing reasonable accommodation?

Are there any successful business policies or practices to share?

Which sectors are most open to this conversation?

## Discussion Summary

### Cancer Education and Awareness

- Cancer can be a chronic illness, with treatment extending years beyond initial diagnosis.
- Education and awareness surrounding cancer must first be implemented before communication and policy solutions can be addressed to improve organizational support and culture.
- Some companies have started including cancer in their diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies.

### Workplace Support and Gaps

- There is currently no standardized HR practice for offering support to employees impacted by cancer; not all companies have HR professionals.
- Human resources specialists are generally limited in their ability to create flexible circumstances for employees impacted by cancer; however, they can implement senior leadership's vision for addressing this issue in the workplace.
- Some survivors and caregivers must immediately begin treatment upon diagnosis and are unable to return to work until a later date.
- It is a challenge for employees to balance appropriate level of disclosure with personal medical privacy as they wait for medical results and diagnosis; it is hard to predict how much time they will need off from work.
- Colleagues, management, and HR often expect patients and caregivers to resume back to normalcy upon completion of treatment or after a loved one passes.
- Participants agreed with research presented that returning to work is often the largest challenge surrounding cancer.
- Participants expressed challenges in understanding what reasonable accommodation looks like in practice.

## RECOMMENDED WORKPLACE PRACTICES

- Provide onboarding and regular reminders for employer-provided benefits and protocol upon diagnosis; benefits explanations and paperwork can be quite extensive to navigate once diagnosed
- Familiarize HR and managers with accommodations and insurance to provide guidance to employees needing to use those benefits
- Sick time donations
- Work from home accommodations
- Flexibility for mid-day rest breaks
- Delegate travel responsibilities to other colleagues

## ROLE FOR CANCER PATHWAYS IN TRANSFORMING COMMUNICATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Participants recommended using Cancer Pathways’ services and resources to help transform communications in the workplace. Cancer Pathways is strongly positioned to offer the following services and resources to educate and train workforces, including:

- Workplace navigators
- Transforming communications
- One-on-one counseling
- Support groups
- Communication training during manager onboarding

In 2019 alone, Cancer Pathways served employees at the following companies:

- |   |  |                                      |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| • Alliant Insurance Services              | • Federal Managers Association         | • Pfizer                             |
| • Association of Washington Business      | • Fred Hutch Cancer Research Institute | • Sea Mar Community Health Centers   |
| • Ability Employee Resource Group at AT&T | • Interior Architects                  | • Society for Design Seattle Chapter |
| • Boeing                                  | • King County                          | • Socius Law Group                   |
| • Bristol Myers-Squibb                    | • Lenati                               | • Swedish Cancer Institute           |
| • Diep C Foundation                       | • Microsoft                            | • UW Medicine                        |
| • Eli Lilly                               | • People For People                    | • Washington State Senate            |

*To learn more about Cancer Pathways’ offerings for your workplace, visit our [website](#), contact [info@cancerpathways.org](mailto:info@cancerpathways.org) or call (206) 709.1400.*

## ABOUT CANCER PATHWAYS

For over 18 years, Cancer Pathways has been providing unique cancer support programs and educational services to adults, teens, children, and their families and friends touched by cancer. Our programs are designed to meet people where they are at in their experience with cancer, including employers, survivors, patients, and caregivers in the workplace.

ROUNDTABLE AGENDA

Time	Session	Speaker
9:00 AM - 9:15 AM	Welcome & Introductions	<b>Anna Gottlieb, MPA</b> <i>Executive Director &amp; Founder</i> Cancer Pathways
9:15 AM - 10:00 AM	<b>Return to Work:</b> Perspectives from Cancer Survivors and Employers	<b>Jean Yi, PhD</b> <i>Senior Staff Scientist</i> Fred Hutch
10:00 AM - 10:40 AM	Cancer & Disability	<b>Susan Mazrui, MA</b> <i>Director, Global Public Policy</i> AT&T
10:40 AM - 10:50 AM	Break & Snack	
10:50 AM - 11:20 AM	Practice, Policy, and Law	<b>Elizabeth Hanley, JD</b> <i>Member</i> Reed Longyear Malnati & Ahrens PLLC  <b>Amy Anderson, MHPA, JD</b> <i>Government Affairs Director</i> Association of Washington Business  <b>Bob Battles, JD</b> <i>General Counsel &amp;</i> <i>Government Affairs Director</i> Association of Washington Business
11:20 AM - 11:35 AM	Tips for Communicating About Cancer	<b>Teri Pollastro</b> <i>Research &amp; Patient Advocate</i>
11:35 AM - 12:20 PM	Moderated Discussion	<b>Mary Nicholas, PhD</b> <i>Program Director</i> Cancer Pathways
12:20 PM - 12:30 PM	Closing Remarks	<b>Elisabeth Clymer</b> <i>Program Manager</i> Cancer Pathways

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