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Letting Support In: The Important Role of Care Partners in Gynaecological Cancer

September is Gynaecological Cancer Awareness Month: a time to raise awareness, share information, and bring attention to the experiences of women affected by gynaecological cancers. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge the people who support them: care partners.

At Genmab, we recognise that people living with gynaecological cancers face many challenges beyond their diagnosis, from understanding treatment options and navigating the healthcare system, to managing the emotional and practical impacts of cancer. Listening to people affected by cancer helps us better understand these needs, and we believe care partners are an important part of the support network, helping their loved one navigate these challenges and feel less alone.

A care partner may be a spouse, relative, friend, neighbour, colleague, or another trusted person chosen by the individual. Their role will vary depending on the individual, relationship, culture, and circumstances.

For many women with gynaecologic cancers, accepting help can be difficult, as it often marks a significant shift in their typical dynamic. They may be accustomed to caring for others, organising family life, and maintaining their independence. A cancer diagnosis can disrupt that role, and some may try to manage alone to avoid worrying or burdening others.

Accepting care can bring its own emotional challenges. Women may worry about the impact their illness is having on those they love, fear what the future may bring for their family or relationships, and feel distress at seeing those close to them worried or in pain.

Communication can also be challenging. Some people may not know how to explain what they are experiencing, while others may share only limited information. Although understandable, this can make it harder for those around them to offer useful support.

For some, emotional support may also come from peers. Patient advocacy communities can provide trusted spaces where people feel understood through shared experience.

Letting others in can help make the experience more manageable. Care partners may help by attending appointments, taking notes, preparing questions to ask healthcare providers,

finding reliable information, taking on household tasks, or simply being present on difficult days. Small acts of support can reduce practical and emotional pressure.

Many care partners want to help but are unsure what to do. Clear, specific requests can give them a meaningful role:

“I don’t need advice, but I would appreciate help with meals this week.”

“Can you come to my appointment and take notes?”

“I may not always want to talk, but please keep checking in.”

“I want to do most things on my own, but I may need help with certain things.”

Care partners may need support, too. They may worry about saying the wrong thing, asking too much, or not doing enough. Caring for someone with cancer can take an emotional toll, and taking time to seek help or connect with others is not only important for their own well-being, it also enables them to continue supporting the person they care for. With the patient and care partner’s permission, healthcare professionals, and advocacy organisations can help care partners understand how to provide meaningful support, share appropriate information, and recognise when they need support themselves.

The goal is not for care partners to take over. It is to build support around the person with cancer while respecting their independence, preferences, and boundaries.

Every support system will look different. What matters is that each person affected by cancer has the opportunity to receive help in a way that feels right for them.

This Gynaecological Cancer Awareness Month, let us broaden how we think about care. Care is not only medical treatment. It is also a message, a meal, a listening ear, or the reassurance that no one has to face cancer alone.