

CANCER PATIENT REMEMBRANCE

You and I and medical professionals everywhere are ever mindful of the triumphs and tragedies represented by the records in our databases and registries.

We should never forget that while we enjoy the daily pleasures and the company of our colleagues, there are others who have endured and are presently enduring the misery, deprivation and discomfort of the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

I call your attention to this small table that occupies a place of dignity and honor. It is set for one, symbolizing the fact that some of our loved ones are missing from this gathering. They have been diagnosed with cancer, and they are the names and faces behind the records in the Cancer Registry.

The chair is empty. Many of those who fought the battle with cancer are no longer with us, but rather than mourning their loss, we choose to celebrate their lives.

We call them cases when we don't want to get emotionally involved, but we should call them patients, family members, friends or colleagues. They are unable to be with their loved ones and families now, so let us join together to recognize and honor them, and to bear witness to their struggle and their memory.

The table is small, symbolizing the frailty of a single patient, sometimes alone in the fight against his or her disease.

The tablecloth is white, symbolic of the medical profession, doctors, nurses and researchers who helped fight the battle for life.

The single red rose in the vase signifies the courage they held as they fought this battle and the enduring love of their families and friends and the strength of the patients will to fight the disease that, unfortunately, ultimately has claimed many of them.

The pink ribbon on the vase represents the ribbons worn on the lapels of millions who support a continued search for a cure, not only for breast cancer, but for other cancers as well – cancers that are expected to kill over half a million people in the United States this year.

A slice of lemon on the plate reminds us of the bitter battle against a deadly disease; a battle fought by more than 1.2 million new patients each year.

The salt sprinkled on the plate reminds us of the countless tears of personal anguish shed by the patient and those shed by family members and friends who have lost a loved one.

The glass is inverted in memory of those who are not here to join our celebration of successes.

The candle represents the light of hope that lives in the hearts of registrars – hope represented by cancer survivors and the hope for a cure discovered as a result of the detailed, accurate data we collect on these patients.

There are post it notes on each of your chairs. Please take this time during this meeting to write the names of cancer patients on these notes – your family, friends and colleagues, the survivors and those who did not survive. Stick the notes on the tablecloth. As we begin this meeting, this table will not be an impersonal remembrance, but a very personal memorial to each one of you.