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# Return to Work Experience of Cancer Patients

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**Background:** The numbers of people surviving cancer and remaining in or returning to their place of employment of work is increasing. By 2031, the projected numbers of Canadians who will be living with cancer will be 2.2 million. Half of all cancer survivors are in the prime of their working life and while cancer survivors report a strong desire to return to work, they are 1.4 times more likely to be unemployed.

**Purpose:** To explore cancer survivors' experiences undergoing cancer treatment, while remaining in the workforce, or the experience of transitioning back into the workforce.

**Method:** Individuals were recruited during their appointment at the Cancer Clinic and those who agreed to be part of the research were invited to participate in individual interviews. The interviews lasted 60 to 120 minutes. Participants ranged in age from 45 – 71 years and included one male and 7 females.

**Results:** Individual interviews allowed cancer survivors to give voice to their unique experiences and helped to identify factors that can facilitate and/or hinder RTW programs for cancer survivors. The reasons for continuing to work while undergoing cancer treatment included *maintaining personal identity, input from family and colleagues, and financial need*. The two main themes that emerged when asked how continuing to work or transitioning back to work impacted their quality of life were *return to normalcy and sense of purpose*. Participants identified *supportive work environments, (co-workers & supervisors)* as key to their being able to stay in the workforce during cancer treatment. As for recommendations for others who wish to stay in the workforce during cancer treatment, the three key themes were: *clear communication, being assertive about one's needs, and more readily available information about supportive resources, such as financial aid*.