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Commentary

Cycling 4,000 miles to Anchorage for cancer survivorship

Doug Ulman | Aug 12, 2011

(Update, 8/14: Due to a canceled flight, the author won't be able to meet the riders at the finish line in Anchorage. The commentary below has been changed to reflect that.)

This weekend, 44 students from The University of Texas will ride their bicycles into Anchorage, their final destination in a 4,500-mile journey from Austin. They are the [LIVESTRONG Texas 4000 for Cancer](#) riders, and I am proud to know them and share in their triumph. This is the eighth year for the Texas 4000 to pedal from Austin to Anchorage in the longest annual charity ride in the world, and it is the first year for [LIVESTRONG](#) to proudly ride alongside as a partner.

And why do 44 students make a conscious choice to submit their bodies to such a grueling task -- facing inclement weather, treacherous terrain, long days in the "saddle" and distracted motorists -- while their peers are off enjoying the lazy days of summer? Because these extraordinary students have chosen to do something that emulates and elevates the fight against cancer, requiring fierce determination and the knowledge that they can't do it alone.

They ride in honor of cancer survivors, sharing hope, knowledge and charity along the way. They ride for me. I'm a three-time cancer survivor and, along with 28 million of my fellow survivors, we are the reason they ride. **LIVESTRONG** is proud to partner with these amazing young people and support their ride.

This year alone, 1.5 million Americans will face a new diagnosis and, due to advances in medicine and treatment options, more of them will survive than ever before.

But once they have completed treatment and said goodbye to their medical team, they will find that while cancer may leave their bodies, its effects can last a lifetime -- physically, emotionally and financially. Calibrating these effects and offsetting them with resources and support is the focus of an emerging field in the cancer community -- survivorship.

This summer, to help shed light on the challenges survivors face and how the survivorship field can address them, **LIVESTRONG** released a new survey, "[I Learned to Live with It" Is Not Good Enough: Challenges Reported by Post-Treatment Cancer Survivors in the LIVESTRONG Surveys](#)", that explores the post-treatment needs of survivors and analyzes how their physical, emotional and practical needs compare to survivors **LIVESTRONG** surveyed in 2006.

The survey results show fewer Americans today are getting help for physical, emotional and practical concerns after cancer than in 2006.

Medical bills are the leading cause of bankruptcy in America. However, only one in five respondents received help with debt, insurance coverage or career concerns. Seventy-nine percent said they suffered from fear centered on a possible recurrence yet only 49 percent got emotional help. That's down 2 percent since 2006.

And many reported chronic physical effects like trouble concentrating, lingering pain and lack of energy, with varying levels of help for those challenges.

The report shows survivorship has a long way to go. The good news is that there are resources to help survivors and their families navigate the after-effects of cancer.

Within the cancer community, there are many nonprofit organizations and services who seek to fill the gaps. **LIVESTRONG**'s navigation services, like the American Cancer Society's, connect survivors with information and services to overcome the during-treatment and post-treatment challenges they face.

Through our ongoing work and with dedicated partners like the **LIVESTRONG** Texas 4000 team we aim to continue to advocate for treating survivorship as a distinct phase of the cancer continuum. It's the voices of 44 college students, delivering a message of hope to everyone they encounter along their more than 4,000-mile trek that helps survivors' voices be heard.

As the **LIVESTRONG** Texas 4000 riders pull into Anchorage I think about what one rider, Lauren Rego, recently blogged, "Even though telling people why I ride can be difficult, it's why I ride. There will be no way around the pain until we find cures for cancers, and until then I will not be silent and shrug my shoulders."

Fundamentally, **LIVESTRONG** is about hope -- hope for a cancer-free future. But until we get there, we will continue to work each day to fight cancer, help people live and thrive with and through cancer, and bring the voice of survivors to life.

This week, as the **LIVESTRONG** Texas 4000 riders pedal in to Anchorage, I hope this great city will join me in celebrating their achievement, and standing together to advocate for better care, better medicine, better treatments and better answers for the millions of people who will someday wake up and ask: Now what?

Doug Ulman is a three-time cancer survivor and president and CEO of Livestrong, a nonprofit organization that serves people and families affected by cancer. The **LIVESTRONG** Texas 4000 team will arrive in Anchorage on August 13.

The views expressed here are the writer's own and are not necessarily endorsed by Alaska Dispatch. Alaska Dispatch welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, e-mail [commentary\(at\)alaskadispatch.com](mailto:commentary(at)alaskadispatch.com).