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'I got this' Grandview rallies around staff member diagnosed with cancer

By Andrew Crowley | acrowley@reporter-times.com Jul 11, 2018



Sharon Ernest works at Grandview Health and Rehabilitation. She is beloved by the staff for her positivity, smiles, sei humor and her hardworking nature. She was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year, and the staff and residents have around her. Photo courtesy of Chelsea Frederick.

MARTINSVILLE

When Sharon Ernest gave notice to her previous employer and accepted the job offer to return Grandview Health and Rehabilitation, she didn't know the financial repercussions that would follow.

Just before starting her job at Grandview, she went in for a medical exam, and her doctor urged her to get a colonoscopy as well.

The results were not good — her doctor found four malignant polyps. Because she was a new hire at Grandview, her benefits hadn't kicked in so she was on COBRA insurance.

"I would have never switched, because I had the insurance," Ernest said. "It's not because I don't want to do these people, I do. I would have never switched jobs, because now this COBRA insurance is outrageous."

The staff of Grandview has been supportive of Ernest since her diagnosis.

"At first I thought I wasn't going to have a job, because when I came here, I thought, 'Uh oh, I'm in a bad shape,' because I already gave them my notice," Ernest said.

She said that they had been very flexible in her needs, letting her leave early when she needed medical appointments.

Prior to her diagnosis, Ernest had no idea she had cancer, but she remains positive, a trademark of her personality.

"It's what they call a silent killer," Ernest said. "So now it's in the lymph nodes, and they consider it stage 4. It kind of throws me, but I'm going to beat it. I always say, 'I got this.'"

Ernest has gone through one round of chemo and begins her second round today. Chemo is the time Ernest doesn't feel good. Prior to chemo, she has to take five steroids.

"Steroids are not cheap, they're \$197 for five of them," Ernest said. "And that's something that's basically out of pocket. I can do it. I feel good."

That out-of-pocket cost is something that's come as a bit of a shock for her.

"It's ridiculous how much they charge you to keep you alive," Ernest said.

After her diagnosis, she was asked to check to see if anyone else in her family had been diagnosed with colon cancer and to let her relatives know they should check for it.

Things were supposed to be different for Ernest and her family. Last December, her father passed away and she and her siblings took turns to stay with their mother.

"I stayed with Mom every night, and then I'd come in to work," Ernest said. "Then my sister would come in, but now I still can't leave her. We were going to make 2018 good, so guess what, it didn't come out that way."

At the end of June, Grandview held a raffle to help raise money to pay for Ernest's medical bills. They're also selling T-shirts as another means of raising money.

"We're calling our little campaign for her 'I Got This,'" said Chelsea Frederick, Grandview Admission and Marketing Coordinator.

At Grandview, Ernest is beloved by all — coworkers, residents and anyone else who might cross her path. To know her is to love her.

Sally Dawson, who works with her preparing meals in Grandview's kitchen has known Ernest for years.

"She's so happy all the time, and it makes us feel good when she's happy," Dawson said. "And she's always happy; that's what we love about her."

She's also really good with the residents and maintaining a positive attitude, even when things get hectic. That's something respiratory therapist Jonathan Holman noted.

"Every time I see her, she's smiling. She's good to the residents, and despite everything she's going through, she's still a trooper and smiling," Holman said. "When things seem to get stressful, she smiles and she says, 'I got this.' She's very positive."

Sanavah Mackin is relatively new to her position as activity director for Grandview and said that Ernest had her back from day one.

“She’s always willing to hug people. First day I met her, she was like, ‘I love you,’ and we didn’t know each other,” Mackin said. “But it was great because she always has loving arms and hugs when I’m like ‘Hey, how are you doing with your chemo?’ She’s like, ‘I got this.’ That’s her thing always says, ‘I got this.’ And we’ve got her back.”

Along with her kindness and positivity, many of her coworkers cite her hardworking nature, including Amy Crowe, who started the GoFundMe for Ernest.

“She is just something else, she is in here working hard and doing her stuff, and she just takes so good care of everyone and we just love her,” Crowe said. “And that’s why we want to make sure we’re taking care of her and just reaching out to the community and showing them what we’ve got here. Just her every day, just that smile she’s got on her face every day. She says to me, ‘I’ve got this.’”

And the love and positivity Ernest shows is genuine, according to business office manager Janie Lucas.

“We create a family and Sharon has been in the past, and is again this time, part of our family. It just kind of shows, you know, we want to do that for our own mothers, sisters, aunts, so we do that for Sharon,” Lucas said. “Sharon returns that every day I see her, she’s like, ‘Good morning and she’s smiling and hugging, she’s telling me she loves me. She does that for our residents, she does that for all of us, and she means it.”

“And it’s genuine, that’s the difference — she’s genuine. And I just think it’s important as human and coworkers, friends that we support each other. This is more than about beating cancer; this is about being there for each other.”

For more information about Grandview’s shirt campaign for Ernest, call 765-342-7114. Or visit her GoFundMe page at gofundme.com/jywnxq-sharons-medical-fund.

acrowley

