

Janie Spilman
August 1, 2015
Cancer Support Team

After spending last summer studying public health in Cape Town, I decided this summer I wanted to further explore the healthcare field. Cancer Support Team is a non-profit organization in Purchase, New York, and it provides *free* at-home healthcare for cancer patients, regardless of whether or not they have insurance. Cancer Support Team, or more commonly called CST, not only has nurses who go on home or hospital visits, but it also consists of three case managers and a social worker who work with patients that might need more than just health guidance. The case managers help patients with all kinds of daily life activities, such as applying for benefits. The social worker helps patients and their families sort through the emotional stresses of their situation. In addition to these services, CST has volunteer drivers who drive patients who have no other means of transportation to and from doctor visits or radiation treatments. The staff at CST is highly devoted and passionate about the services they provide, which was imbedded in me from day one.

Although I mainly worked with the office administrators and the CFO, the non-profit's small size allowed me to see all aspects of the agency. While I did do the menial tasks of an unpaid intern, like answering phone calls, making photocopies, and sorting the mail, I mainly dedicated my time to three big projects.

My first responsibility was to update CST's donor database. I researched and updated over 500 contacts and then recorded the information into Abila, the electronic donor database system CST commonly refers to. Along with contacting these donors, I also asked them if they would like to receive our LifeLines resource book. LifeLines provides up-to-date oncology resources for cancer patients and their families. Some of these resources include, but are not

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limited to, local wig stores, hospitals, or bereavement services. After sorting through those who wished for LifeLines, I then organized the distribution of the book. When I finished this project, CST could not have been more thankful. Since the departure of their director in February of 2015, the staff is swamped with extra work and has not been able to complete this project. This book is the only one of its kind, and oncology offices and doctors across the Westchester County use it quite often. By sending out LifeLines I was not just helping the CST team, but also the greater community. From working on the donor database and LifeLines mailing, I learned how to work with a new electronic system, and also learned more about the surrounding support services CST interacts with.

The next assignment was to sort through past patient charts and prepare them to be scanned into the electronic patient records. I alphabetized, ordered, and cleaned out any miscellaneous items that the file contained. Although these charts are rarely referenced, CST must keep tabs on everyone who used their services. When I was sifting through the charts, I found myself wanting to know more details about the patient, like what kind of cancer they had, where they were from, and did they apply for handicapped services. By learning the details of each patient, I saw what kinds of obstacles arise for cancer patients who do not have the financial or necessary means to help themselves. These charts were hard to see, but it also gave me a greater sense of the exact issues the nurses, case managers, and social workers at CST have to deal with on a daily basis.

The most time-consuming assignment of the summer was working with Swim Across America. Swim Across America is a nationwide fundraiser that raises money for cancer

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research. Swim Across America has a local branch in Westchester County that performs swims all throughout the summer. While there is one large swim in the Long Island Sound, there are smaller one-mile swims that occur in swimming pools. Some people in our office, including myself, participated in a one-mile swim on Friday, July 17 at New York Athletic Club, which was very fun. Swim Across America and Cancer Support Team are related because CST is one of four grantees who receives a donation from the funds raised by the swims. Since there is only a handful of volunteers who execute these swims, CST lends out their intern to help with the event planning.

My task for Swim Across America was to find volunteers to help coordinate the event. This swim is on a much bigger scale than the pool swims; there are usually over 350 swimmers who are categorized into 6-mile swimmers, 4-mile swimmers, or 1-mile ones who swim from the Larchmont Yacht Club to the Larchmont Shore Club. In order to execute this event, there need to be around 100 kayakers to monitor the swimmers in the open waters, and 100 volunteers to help with signing swimmers in and out, numbering the swimmers, and transporting kayakers and boats out of the water. I sought out potential volunteers by sending out multiple mass emails, then made phone calls, and kept Excel spreadsheets of the current volunteers. I had weekly phone calls and meetings with Tony Sibio, the head volunteer and kayaker coordinator. On the Tuesday before the event, Tony, three other volunteer coordinators, and I locked ourselves up in the CST board room and assigned positions to volunteers. It was more difficult than I realized because certain jobs required certain people. For instance, there needed to be experienced people signing swimmers in and out due to the natural chaos of registering 300 plus people at 6 a.m. on

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a Saturday morning. After six hours of designating jobs, retyping spreadsheets, and no lunch break, we were able to complete the task. The July 25th event went very smoothly, and they were able to raise in excess of \$1 million to find a cure for cancer. I was more than happy to assist with this event and discovered what it would be like to be in the development branch of a non-profit. This job also taught me the importance of keeping track of emails and spreadsheets because if I had not stayed organized, assigning positions would have been way more stressful and confusing.

My time at CST further developed my basic Excel, organizational, and people skills, but also taught me how to deal with others who do not have the same work ethic as me. This summer, I worked with another intern who was a little bit aggravating. She and I had opposite ways we approached our work; I was focused on the task at hand, completed my jobs in a timely fashion, and worked quite diligently. The other intern was often on her cell phone, making personal phone calls when we should have been working, and was constantly asking me questions rather than figuring it out for herself. I often found myself fixing her mistakes or asking her to help me because of her lack of initiative. After experiencing this frustration and seeing my coworkers irritated as well, I have learned the improper worker behavior and actions and have vowed to never act like that in the workplace.

I thoroughly enjoyed my summer at CST. After working in an environment where the people are genuinely happy and absolutely love their job, it made me realize that I need to pursue a career that I love. From weekly team meetings, to working with the director of financial services, I learned all the ins and outs of a small non-profit. I learned more about the American

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healthcare system and more specifically about oncology. This office welcomed me with open arms and while I am sad to be leaving, I know what I completed was beneficial to CST and those they serve.