

Andrea Feldmar

Medical support counselor

Andrea Feldmar is a medical support counselor who specializes in working with people and their caregivers who are experiencing a serious medical diagnosis. In 1994, her family was dealt a devastating blow when her 2-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a deadly form of leukemia. After a successful bone marrow transplant saved her daughter's life, Feldmar dedicated her career to helping others navigate life during serious illness. She is a licensed mental health counselor who also completed training at Harvard's Benson-Henry Institute on mind/body medicine and at the Alzheimer Association in Chicago, focusing on dementia and caregiver issues. 5104 N. Lockwood Ridge Road, Suite 105, Sarasota; 208-2606; andreafeldmar.com.



What drew you to the field of medical support counseling?

It was a need that was not being met in the community. It was also the direct result of a personal experience. My 25-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia when she was 2. Her only chance of survival was with aggressive chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. We spent our days and nights holding vigil in the hospital for many months. At the time, I would have given anything to talk to someone who understood the challenges we were attempting to cope with, the decisions we were grappling with and could help us navigate through the upheaval in our lives.

What are some of the basic services you offer?

I provide a safe and knowledgeable outlet to talk, strategize and create coping tools to ease the pressure and havoc these circumstances create. Caregivers and patients need an environment to talk about their fears, anger and the future.

What happens during a consultation?

We explore the vast array of issues that many patients and caregivers don't have others to share with, including fear, anger, anxiety, depression and often, a feeling of isolation. Many times, friends and family members simply don't understand or know what to say or how to act, so personal relationships become fractured. Everyone wants things to "go back to normal," but, unfortunately, there is no going back; it's about creating a "new normal" and the "new normal" can look very different from the old one.

How do perspectives and relationships change?

People tend to reassess their lives and the choices they have made. It's a time to take stock and decide what's important and what is just noise in your life. It's not uncommon for people to find friends aren't around anymore. They continue living the life that you, as the patient or caregiver, were once a part of, but now no longer fit into. Relationships with partners also shift. Many of the old patterns and rules no longer hold up or can be abided by due to the change in the situation. This can be a great source of stress.