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**LIFE, WITH CANCER**

## New Web sites help relationships flower

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Life, With Cancer

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Online dating poses a terrifying set of dilemmas for the modern-day single person. Mr. Right, unfortunately, too often turns out to be Mr. Oh So Wrong in the dot-com world of courtship.

Just imagine the added stress for cancer patients.

At what point in the mating ritual do you reveal your health history? What about intimacy, marriage and kids, and whether you are able to have them? What about explaining the reason you may have a basket of medications in your bathroom that is bigger than the sink? Why you sometimes prefer Saltines and ginger ale to chocolate and champagne?

A new online dating service hopes to solve some of those dilemmas by creating a dating/companionship forum for people who share one enormous common denominator: cancer. The site, one of the first of its kind in the country, cisforcupid.com, went online last week. The translation: C is for Cupid.

Lesley Topping, a breast cancer survivor and one of the site's creators, says she hopes it will allow people with similar stories to meet. It's then up to them to decide how much they reveal, and when.

"I think there are a lot of people who probably feel more comfortable breaking the ice this way," said Topping, a Brooklyn film editor whose sister works for Newsday.

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For some, it could be the ideal place to meet someone who knows exactly what you're going through or have gone through. But for others, who really don't want to increase their cancer stress by meeting a potential mate with the same set of issues, it may not be right.

"You're facing your own fears when you go onto a site like this, so it's not for everyone," she said. "It's a controversial idea, but I think it could be helpful."

Unlike Match.com or other sites where the available "face of the day" is what greets you when you first log on, this site offers something different. It's a tranquil, colored painting of cranes.

The bird is a symbol of longevity, luck and love, said Topping, 51, and the painting hung in her parents' home for much of her life. She would often look to it for comfort while undergoing treatment in 1999 and 2000. Also, she said, cranes have a beautiful mating dance.

The goal of the site, she said, is to provide a comfortable and confidential environment for people to connect with compatible singles and friends.

Membership is free, and startup was made possible through donations. Like other online services, people create their profiles by answering a set of questions about themselves and what they are looking for. "You talk about yourself and your interests. You can choose whether to talk about cancer in your profile or to do it privately," she said, adding that each member is assigned a private mailbox.

Those who want to view profiles must go through a registration and approval process. It's not by any means an exclusive club, Topping said, and most everyone is welcome. But because the site invariably involves cancer and health, there are privacy issues that crop up. Registration provides at least a basic level of screening.

A similar site, Prescription4Love.com, launched in 2006 and is geared toward people with all sorts of health issues, ranging from diabetes to obesity. Topping, who is separated but not dating, said she's perused other sites and has been to support groups where the goal is to simply meet others who have been affected by cancer. The next step of dating is often tricky. She had the idea for the Web site for a few years but waited, not knowing whether it would work. Another friend, also a cancer survivor, came up with the name, and others helped build the site.

"As a concept, it's fabulous. This particular service is yet another signpost of

the tipping point that is the social movement of the youth cancer culture," said Matthew Zachary, 32, a Brooklyn-based pediatric brain cancer survivor who founded the Web site [stepsforliving.org](http://stepsforliving.org), which provides resources and advocacy for young cancer patients and survivors. Zachary met his wife through a friend, but her brother was undergoing cancer treatment at the time. He said their mutual understanding ended up helping them forge a stronger bond. "Our cancer connection made us understand and appreciate what we were going through in our lives." They married in 2005.

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