

## CancerEd 2016

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**Funding: Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, Gladys and Ruth Wierenga, Calvin Alumni Association**

Cancer has frequently been perceived as a taboo subject that one should avoid discussing with others, especially with children; however, cancer prevalence has increased greatly in recent years among children and adults alike, so communicating this subject effectively and accurately is now of utmost importance. Children who are affected by cancer, either directly or indirectly, tend to develop misconceptions, anxiety, and questions from things they overhear in the media, from their peers, or from their family members. Our goal as CancerEd is to create freely-accessible curriculum materials for teachers and hospital staff to help teach children about cancer in an engaging, effective, and scientifically accurate way. We hope to correct any misconceptions that children may have about cancer, as well as provide them with the vocabulary and scientific knowledge that they may hear from others so that they can be informed and have less anxiety about what might be happening with a loved one or friend.

To gain information about the current dialogue of cancer and assess the need of educational resources in the classroom, we launched a teacher's survey, which we sent out to a variety of schools around the state of Michigan. We sent the survey to every principal in Kent County, including elementary, middle and high school principals, and then we randomly selected 100 other school districts in the state of Michigan and sent it to each of those principals as well. A letter accompanied the survey instructing the principals to distribute the survey to their teaching staff, and we collected 124 responses. More data analysis is yet to be conducted; however, we noticed a gross underestimation of the number of students teachers believe are affected by cancer either directly or indirectly. After asking teachers how many students were affected by cancer, teachers reported around 5%, but after some calculations and discovering some statistics, this percentage is actually around 20-30%.

We also recently launched a survey for adults who have parented children between 5 and 18 years of age while undergoing their own (or another primary adult caregiver's) cancer journey. We hope to discover information about how parents communicate with their children about cancer or why they choose not to disclose certain information to their children. We hope to develop resources that parents can use to help facilitate these types of conversations in the future. We sent the survey to cancer blog administrators, cancer organizations, cancer support groups, etc. and we sent a letter encouraging them to distribute and promote our survey.

More lesson plans are continually being developed so they can be uploaded to our website at CancerEd.org. We currently have a variety of lesson topics for kindergarteners through fifth graders including *Cells and Cell Division*, *What is Cancer*, *Leukemia*, *Supporting Those with Cancer*, *Metastasis*, *Lung Cancer*, *Brain Cancer*, *Chemotherapy*, *Side Effects of Chemotherapy*, *Bone Marrow Transplants*, *Skin Cancer Prevention*, *What Causes Cancer*, *Can you Catch It?* and more. Each lesson is complete with everything the educator will need, including educational standards, additional resources, supplementary materials, and background information for teachers. These lessons are created to provide students with a hands-on, inquiry-based learning environment to engage students in this important topic of conversation and to hopefully encourage retention of the material to be used in the future.

Working with Professor Wilstermann this summer has been an incredible opportunity. She has a passion for this work that she has instilled in both Ryan and I, and her compassionate heart has made this project what it is today. I have been blessed to be part of the development of this cancer curriculum, and hearing some of the positive responses from those in our community has made me realize how important the work we are doing really is. Not only that, but I have developed such useful skills such as communicating effectively, creativity, organization, efficiency, dedication, and critical thinking that will be helpful in any future career I may have. I have always felt a nudge to pursue a medical profession in pediatrics, but this project has transformed that nudge into a huge shove, and I really feel as though my skills and passions can be used in the hematology/oncology field of medicine to provide parents and children with support and comfort during a crisis like cancer.