



From the President of Willowcare;

Dealing with a chronic illness can be a difficult journey. I know, as I have had a chronic illness for more than 24 years. At the age of 26, I was diagnosed with “symptoms of MS”. While I all but lost the use of my left side, I struggled with the thought that this could be the beginning of the end for me. At the time, I was a new mom with a 10 month old baby. Tying a shoe, changing a diaper, even holding him was a challenge. Not to mention taking care of a house and a husband. I endured the prednisone therapy, physical and occupational therapy and the challenges that faced me every day. The depression and discouragement seemed to overwhelm me. Fortunately, I had a very strong support system in family and friends. And I guess the most important moment for me came when my father took me aside one day and told me “You have two choices. You can give in and let this take you down or you can fight. And I think we raised a fighter.” From that moment on, I was determined to do whatever I could to regain my life again. During the next 6 months, I did everything that I could to improve my outcome. I researched my illness, began to take supplements, made a few lifestyle changes and relied on my spiritual convictions to keep me focused and thankful for each new day. Over time, my symptoms seemed to disappear and life became “normal” again for me. But the fear loomed in the back of my mind - “what if it returns?”

Nearly 18 years passed before it reared its ugly head again and returned with a vengeance. Fortunately, research in treatments for this illness had exploded during that time. But the long-term effects of the more recent relapses left their mark. Age was not my friend either! Last year, my husband and I decided to seek an additional opinion in my treatment and decided to head to a facility where research and cutting edge therapy was available. The Mellen Center at the Cleveland Clinic was just such a place. They approached my illness with a holistic approach like I had never seen before! We discussed not only medications, but vitamins and supplements, diet, exercise, psychological support and much more. I was charged to come back home and find those who had experience in helping patients with chronic illness. Well, there isn't a section in the phone book for that! Nor was there a website that could help me navigate what I was looking for. Enter Willow Care, Inc.

My background has been in working with non-profits for more than 25 years in this community. So, I decided that it was time to put my experience and skills to work for people who were just like me – searching for answers and support. And so, Willow Care, Inc. was established to be a networking information center for people across the Michiana area. My goal is to help you find support, information and encouragement that will hopefully guide you on your journey to a fulfilling life while managing a chronic illness.

Carol Swope