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WRT 205

Research Project

Rough Draft

“I’ve been diagnosed with terminal cancer, what next?”

Hearing these words can be the scariest thing that ever happens to you. It may seem like you are out of options, however this is not the case. There are many different treatment options if you choose to fight your illness and in some cases these treatments have extended patients lives significantly.

“What does chemotherapy really mean?”

Chemotherapy is a tried and true method for cancer treatment. Because the process is not targeted it not only kills the cancer cells, but also the healthy body cells. This can cause other health issues for patients, however it has also proven to be extremely successful. When the cancer is terminal there are other factors to consider when thinking about chemo because it is such an aggressive process. According to a study published in BioMed Central continuing chemotherapy treatments until near death does not increase survival rate, but it does decrease likelihood of being placed in hospice care.

How are immunotherapy treatments different?

Immunotherapy treatments are currently one of the biggest advancements in cancer treatment because they help the bodies immune system fight back against the cancer. A health editor for the Guardian wrote an article promoting these treatments that focused on a woman who was diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma, which normally has a survival rate of months, and is alive after 10 years. Because they are still in the clinical trial phase they can be dangerous and cause unexpected side effects. They also may not be as effective; there are so many factors that can influence success including patient age, cancer type and stage of the trial. The benefit is that your body is not attacked in the same way as during chemotherapy so you should experience less severe side effects.

“So what should I do?”

Every case is different and every patient has different goals for their treatment process. Many times the best thing is a combination of treatments, which is referred to as palliative care. Researchers in Hong Kong published a study about a Chinese woman who was diagnosed with terminal cancer and received chemotherapy that helped for awhile, however her condition progressed. She wanted to keep fighting so oncology experts, palliative care physicians, psychologists and social workers met to discuss the best options for her palliative care. After consulting with the family she continued the treatment until she was in a lot of pain and it was decided she should move into hospice where she died after 10 days surrounded by her family. If you want to fight then by all means you should fight, however it is important to see when it is time move on so you do not have to experience any unnecessary pain.

“When things get bad should I move into hospice care?”

While you are undergoing treatment you will most likely be in and out of the hospital. If you wish to live in hospice care eventually this is something you should tell you doctor so they can adjust your treatment plan. Patients who moved into hospice care once death seemed imminent experienced better end of life care and their families were more satisfied in the way their loved one passed away.

Last thoughts

The most important part in this process is to know what you and your loved ones want and to communicate this to your doctor. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and do your own research so you can be informed about your options before speaking with your doctor. This can be a very difficult process, however it is important to consider all options because there may be a trial out there that is a good fit for your needs, you just need to find it.