

SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY
CREAMER

SAW
DOCTOR



A saw doctor's advice to a good friend who was recently diagnosed with a treatable, yet very serious form of cancer.

This advice should apply to anyone in that position, but I warn you, taking the advice of a saw doctor about medical issues does not relieve you of the responsibility of consulting with medical doctors. I should also warn you to never consult with medical doctors on saw related issues.

Read Two Books

Lance Armstrong wrote a great book entitled "It's Not About the Bike." This is a must read for anybody who is either going through cancer treatment, has a friend or loved one who is going through cancer treatment, or anyone who is going through anything in life that is a bit hard to deal with.

The other book is "How Doctors Think," by Jerome Groopman. Once you understand how doctors think, you will have a much better chance of finding the right doctor for you and getting the best care they have to offer. The best way to get help from a saw doctor in solving a sawmill problem is to be able to communicate with him or her. To do that effectively, you must understand how they think. Medical doctors are the same in this respect. Once you understand how they think, you will be in a much better position to communicate effectively with them, and consequently you will get much more out of them.

Be Aggressively Proactive

Most of us who read this magazine tend to live either out in the country or in relatively small towns. Unfortunately that is not where the better doctors usually choose to practice. In my opinion, the better doctors can be found at teaching hospitals and the best doctors happen to be at the more renowned teaching hospitals. Your local doctors may be great people and also competent doctors, but if you want to beat cancer, you have to get better than just competent. You need to be dealing with the pioneers in their field. The ones who are at the forefront of the latest technology being used to treat the specific kind of cancer you or your friend has. And believe it or not, I have found that not all doctors are as current as they should be on the latest and greatest treatments

and studies that are available for their particular specialty. The more you learn about a particular disease, the more you will be able to spot the doctors who may not be quite as current as others you will encounter.

Educate Yourself

You also need to start learning everything you can learn about your disease. The information is out there and relatively easy to find on the Internet. One caution though is to be careful of what you read online. Make sure you can tell the difference between advertisements and real scientific data. Also be aware that when it comes to information about diseases on the Internet, it mostly seems to discuss worst case scenarios. You may have the same symptoms and the same disease, but the prognosis may be nowhere near as dire as what you are reading, because you may have a much less severe form of it. Take anything you read about a disease with a grain of salt and mostly use the information you get to ask your doctor better questions.

Get Organized

Go to an office supply store and find yourself some sort of filing system that you will easily be able to carry with you from one doctor's appointment to another. Even though all of the doctors will have a file on you, it is important that you keep track of everything on your own. This isn't the flu or appendicitis. You are playing in the big leagues now and you had better be well informed, well organized, and on your toes at all times.

Every time you get a blood test or any other test, ask the lab to send you a copy of the results. They may ask you to sign something to allow them to give you your own test results, but signatures are easy. What happens is that you get a blood test. Then they send the results to your doctor. Then you anxiously wait for the doctor to call you with the results, or maybe you will be told the results at your next appointment. That is their system and they seem satisfied with it. I have my own system.

I have found that if you were expecting a call from your doctor about the results, you wait and wait and then you call them. They tell you that they haven't seen the results yet, So

you call the lab and ask them why the doctor doesn't have the report yet. The lab tells you that they sent it and probably the doctor has the report buried somewhere on his desk or something. You can now call the doctor back, but it really won't get you very far without coaxing the lab to fax them another copy. That's a lot of messing around on the phone and can be quite aggravating. The other scenario is that you just show up for your appointment and the doctor says nothing about that particular test. So you ask, and then he tells you that he doesn't seem to have the report, or can't find it. So maybe he has someone call the lab and have them fax it right away. Who needs that sort of thing to get in the way of what could have been a more meaningful appointment?

I just make sure that the lab sends me my own copy. I look it over when I get it. Of course I don't know what some of it means, but these reports are usually set up with flags that show above and below normal levels of whatever they were testing. Some of the highs or lows may actually mean nothing in your situation, but at least now you have seen it before your appointment and you have time to think up questions to ask that are related to that report. And it has happened to me many times that the doctor says he/she doesn't seem to have a copy of a particular report and I offer him my copy which he can copy for own his records if he likes.

It sounds like it is not a big deal, but I have been at this long enough to tell you that it can make each doctor's appointment much more productive for you and the doctor. Good saw doctors like customers who ask intelligent and well informed questions. Medical doctors are no different in that respect. They see more than their share of patients who sit their passively and just want to leave all of the driving and decision making to the doctor, and really don't seem a bit curious about what's going on. Tell me where to go and what to do and I will just follow blindly. That's far from my style.

When you can ask well informed, intelligent questions, the doctor starts to realize that you really are interested

and want to take an active roll in trying to deal with this disease the best you can. The more you appear to want to hear real information, the more the doctor is willing to try to explain things to you. There is nothing worse than going through a lengthy and complicated explanation for someone who just doesn't seem to want to get all that involved.

Don't be afraid to get a second and/or third opinion from another well respected specialist. This will give some better basis for picking which doctor you want to stay with and will also possibly give you some different points of view, or it might just confirm what the first doctor told you. Confirmation, even if it's bad news, can be comforting in the sense that you now feel confident that you know what the options are and what to do about them.

It is very common when confronted with a serious disease to ask yourself the "why me?" question. Well ask it if you must. But make it quick and then get rid of it forever. There are no good answers to it—practical, spiritual or scientific. There are just way too many variables to deal with to get a definitive answer. Some problems are caused by environment, while many are caused by genetics or some combination of the two. Stop trying to blame anyone else and don't dare think of blaming yourself for this one. Just accept that you got it, and now it's time to try your hardest to get rid of it or to just find a way to deal with it. Asking "why me?" serves no productive purpose at this point.

Dealing with your own or a loved one's serious disease is no cakewalk. But if you get educated, get involved and make every effort to take an active role in trying to beat the disease, your chances will improve immensely. And if that doesn't work, at least you can always say you gave it your best shot.

And do remember one more thing. No matter what the disease and no matter what surgery they might do, no surgeon and no disease has yet figured out a way to remove or destroy your sense of humor.



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