

## 7-5-19 Breast Cancer Screening-What Works?

When your daughter calls you while driving and tells you she has some kind of bad news, you pull over and listen and listen and listen. You hold your breath and your heart rate increases. You pretend everything is fine as you listen, and eventually you breathe again.

One of my daughters has breast cancer. It was not a good sign that the doctors immediately ordered two kinds of full body scans. Everyone does not get that. Waiting for the results of MRI's, biopsies and scans is so very difficult.

The family is coming together, of course, and we will be supportive and put some plans in place, for her, her husband and her two children. It is challenging because she lives two hours away. I guess that is better than a plane ride away.

Every day I write something in a journal about her. On the "back sides" of those pages, I write about whatever else is going on that day and make note of nice things and things to be grateful for. Awareness of how precious life is becomes acute and it is important to notice the good while swimming in the turbulent waters of uncertainties.

Speaking of gratitude, my daughter had the opportunity to thank the ultrasound technician who accidentally discovered my daughter's cancer. The ultrasound woman cried. They both cried with joy and gratitude amid a time of bad news.

And that is the amazing thing to be grateful for: This discovery of cancer was an accident. While conducting an ultrasound of cysts, (only the cysts, per order) the ultrasound wand just happened to float over the gel-covered skin a little bit more to one side. That little bit showed the cancer. The technician knew right away that this needed to be seen immediately. The other person who read the scan announced my daughter needed a biopsy. On another day, in another place, the general surgeon announced, "I can tell from looking at this image, I am 95% certain this is cancer." And it was.

After that initial diagnose, there is so, so very much more to know. What type is it? At what stage is it?

While all the mysteries were being unraveled, my daughter was in a state of shock. This was an accidental discovery!!?? She could have gone another year and

even then, maybe it would not have been seen. She certainly would have been another year closer to a higher/worse stage.

Only a few months before this, my niece had just opened her letter stating that her mammogram was clear. Some lifesaving instinct apparently guided her, for she conducted a self-exam, felt a small lump and immediately went to the doctor. A biopsy showed cancer. She is doing well and got off “easy”, though none of this is easy. A lumpectomy and radiation were the course of treatment. She did not lose her hair and she is doing well.

She is doing well because she found the lump; the mammogram did not.

We need a campaign to push for other screening methods besides and/or in addition to mammograms. Part of me understands that insurance companies need to care about costs. They add up numbers and make decisions. Putting aside the “cost” of a life, what about the monetary cost of treating breast cancer? My daughter is facing, at a minimum, a full year of aggressive treatment. Months of chemotherapy in hopes of shrinking the cancer, then surgery of some kind (currently uncertain) and then more months of chemo and radiation. She has been told this plan encompasses the next year of her life.

A year of treatments, when a full ultrasound last year could have discovered this horrendous invader when it was smaller and earlier in its entry. Early detection means faster, easier and more successful treatment.

Add up those numbers, insurance companies!

If anyone has any ideas for this campaign for better, more accurate screenings, please share them with me. I will tell this story to my own primary care physician and ask him for suggestions.

The insurance companies need to care about costs, but we need to care about saving lives. Both goals are achievable.

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