



Fast-Track to Treatment: How a Positive Relationship With Your Doctor Can Accelerate Care

Tammy
CLL Patient Advocate

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Jeff Folloder:

Tammy, you're on the express plan of CLL. You bypassed watch and wait completely. Tell us a little bit about your story.

Tammy:

I did bypass that. I had a cold that wouldn't go away, so I went to see my GP. And at the end of my appointment, I said, oh, by the way, when I get to the top of the stairs, I have to catch my breath. And he kind of looked at my face. Maybe you're anemic. You could be anemic. Do you think you're anemic? Let's get some blood. Okay. So I didn't think anything of it. A couple days later, he called me. He said, "Well, I hate to tell you this over the phone, but I think you might have CLL." I didn't know what that was. I thought okay, what do we do now? "I made an appointment with Dr. Burke for you for this afternoon."

Well, that was really nice of him.

Jeff Folloder:

You really are on the express plan.

Tammy:

I thought wow, that was really nice. Okay, get the address. I drive up, Rocky Mountain Cancer Center. Hmm, wow. Well, maybe they treat other things here, too. So I met Dr. Burke. We chatted a little bit, had some blood drawn, and I think it was a few days later I met him again. And he came in, and we chatted again, and he smiled and he said, "You have leukemia." And kind of right away, treatment started immediately. I still hadn't realized what was happening, what this was. I was like oh, it must not be that bad. What do we do next?

Jeff Folloder:

And what did you do next?

Tammy:

He talked to me about a trial and first thing, just like you said, guinea pig. Do I want to do this? I don't know.

That meant experimental, they don't know about it. And so I asked Dr. Burke, would you do this? Something that kind of stuck with me that he said that I thought was unusual, and he probably doesn't even remember, he said, "When I get cancer, I want to be in a trial." So that kind of sealed it for me right there. Well, if you're gonna do it, I'll do it.

Jeff Folloder:

So you very quickly developed an actual trusting relationship with your doctor.

Tammy:

I did.

Jeff Folloder:

So many times the patient-doctor trust experience is less than optimal. Frequently on Patient Power, we talk about the need for having a specialist in your bullpen, a specialist that you can trust and who is up to date. Tell us how that actually impacted your emotional well-being when you were going through treatment.

Tammy:

I'm kind of one of those naïve people that trusts everything people tell me. I think you're telling me the truth. I think you know what you're talking about. So I just went with it with Dr. Burke and jumped right in. I trusted him completely. Because I also went home and got on the computer and Googled CLL, and you can come up with oh, I'm gonna be gone in three weeks, or I'm gonna make it 20 years. So I decided that was—stay away from that, don't diagnose yourself, find somebody that knows what they're doing, and that's Dr. Burke.

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