



Patient Power

Chemo vs. Transplants: What Is the Purpose and Value of Each Treatment Method?

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Andrew Schorr:

So, just to understand, you went through chemo, you mentioned before, transplants. Some patients will still have transplants. So, Gwen, what's the role of chemo? Why does somebody get chemo before the transplant? What's the purpose?

Dr. Nichols:

So the transplant is intended to provide you, in the case of an allogeneic transplant, a new set of stem cells that come from someone else.

Andrew Schorr:

A healthy immune system.

Dr. Nichols:

A healthy immune system, and also, healthy blood forming cells because your blood forming cells are not healthy. The cells that you're putting in, I like to think of it, the reason for needing chemotherapy or chemo and radiation ahead of a transplant is twofold. One is those two types of cells don't normally live together. And so, if they are both in your bone marrow, at the same time, you don't know who is going to win out, your cells or the cells that are coming from somebody else. And the second part is that the therapy that we give with those cells is not designed to kill your leukemia.

And we know, if you have even minimal amounts of leukemia left in your bone marrow before you get someone else's cells, it increases dramatically the likelihood your own leukemia cells hidden in your marrow will have a chance to have a foothold and come back.

So the chemotherapy, or the therapy ahead of time, is designed to get you to a point where, as best as we can tell, you have no leukemia left in your marrow. And then, these fresh, new cells can come in and have space to grow. We've cleared out the dirt. We cleared out the weeds in the garden so that those cells can grow.

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