



# How to Deal With a Cancer Misdiagnosis

**Lisa Goldman**

Lung Cancer Survivor and Patient Advocate

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## **Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Sitting with me is Lisa Goldman. She is a wife, a mom, a blogger and cyclist/Pilates instructor. Lisa, you do quite a bit, but last year you were diagnosed with lung cancer.

## **Lisa Goldman:**

I got a cold that wouldn't go away. And I remember talking with some friends. It was a Saturday towards the end of October, and it was hard to have a conversation. I just kept coughing, and it was annoying. My friends encouraged me to just drop by the urgent care, because it was a Saturday and I couldn't get into my regular doctor to see if I could get some antibiotics because this had been sort of dragging on for several weeks.

So I did that. I popped into urgent care. They did a quick X-ray and took my vitals, that sort of thing, and said, "Oh, it's probably just a virus. We don't see much or anything on your X-ray. Here's a prescription for some codeine cough syrup."

I went home. I took the codeine cough syrup. It didn't do anything. The cough continued, and so a few weeks later I went to see my primary care physician and told her all this. She said, "Oh, it's probably just irritated airways." And she gave me an inhaler, the first inhaler I've ever had in my life.

Still nothing changed. I went back to her a few weeks later in December, and she said, "Oh, I still think it's irritated airways. I even told her at the time I was coughing up a little bit of blood."

She upped the inhaler prescription and gave me a prescription for fluticasone/salmeterol (Advair) and prednisone (Deltasone). There might have been more antibiotics. I tried all those things. I went to my parents' home for my winter break with my kids, and the coughing was just getting worse to the point where my mom said, "You really need to go see a doctor again and get another scan or X-ray. Something's not right."

And so I did that. I was out of town, and so according to my health insurance I wasn't allowed to see someone out of the plan. I had to only go to an ER. So I went to an ER, lovely. I went in, they did another X-ray. This time the X-ray showed something that they called pneumonia but said I really ought to go get a CT when I went home in January.

I wish at that time I had asked for a CT. I mean, if they saw the need why wait another few weeks? So I went home from the ER and sort of limped along with the prednisone and cough syrups, and we were trying everything. My mom had a humidifier out, all that stuff.

Finally the first week of January I came back home to the Bay Area, I didn't go back to the primary care physician. Luckily, because I have a family friend that's a doctor, he said just go straight to the pulmonologist. And he did a CT that day, and it was just a disaster. I've seen so many CTs I can appreciate that it was really bad. Both my lungs were like completely whited out where it should be basically dark gray or black on a CT.

They scheduled me for a biopsy a few days later. I went in for the biopsy, and my lung partially collapsed in the biopsy. And when I woke up, I was on oxygen, and I was in the ICU for a week. They started me on chemo almost immediately. They were sort of panicked. It was kind of a fire drill at that point. I wasn't breathing very well. I was on oxygen. They started me on chemo 24 hours later after the biopsy. It was kind of crazy. I had no time to research.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Right.

**Lisa Goldman:**

Or pick doctors or anything like that.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

It all happened very fast.

**Lisa Goldman:**

It all happened really fast.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Wow. So you went to one doctor. Went to a second doc, your primary care doctor, "Oh, no, it's got to be something else, an infection."

**Lisa Goldman:**

Right.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

And then finally when you went to that emergency room that was kind of the first step to saying, hmm, there's something else going on here. Do you think that this is part of maybe a larger conversation? A lot of people think this is what a lung cancer patient looks like. Do you feel like those doctors early on kind of said, "Oh, no, she's got an infection. There's no way that can be lung cancer."

**Lisa Goldman:**

Right.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Even with spitting up blood. They were a little dismissive. Do you think that might have been what was going on here?

**Lisa Goldman:**

Absolutely. I don't want to make my primary care doctor feel horrible if she should ever come to see this video. I think she's a good doctor, but I think she was susceptible to the stigma and the stereotypes that all of us are, that I was prior to my diagnosis and didn't push back, and think this patient is fit. This patient has no history of breathing difficulties, no history of asthma, no history of allergies. This doesn't make sense. I'm not going to throw allergy treatment at this. I'm going to do a CT scan and find out what's really going on here.

That's what should have happened. That's what I hope spreading the word, you know, putting my face out there, putting my blog out there, educating people that lung cancer can and does look like this sometimes, and we need to look for the signs that can be so easily passed over.

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