

# **A Wait and See Patient**

**By Robin G. Coles**

In the end, I did give in to chemotherapy treatments but not until my cancer went from Stage 1 to Stage 3.

For four years after my diagnosis, I refused to do any chemo. Instead, I researched what foods to eat and changed my diet – or, more to the point added foods to my diet.

In fact, Dr. Miller and I had this running commentary every visit.

Dr. Miller: You know, one of these days I'll get you

Me: I know – but not now.

For four years it went like this. Meanwhile, the cancer progressed through my body and my office visits became more frequent.

Under the guidance of Dr. Miller I'd go into his office for regular visits, blood tests, and CT scans. I was a "wait and see" patient, he had told me. Wait and see meaning my cancer was ONLY Stage 1 when I first went to him, so traditional treatment wasn't necessary. At least not right then and there. Phew, was I glad. Of all the doctors I had seen since diagnosis, Dr. Miller wasn't afraid or intimidated by my decision not to do any chemicals for treatment. Finding a doctor who will take the time necessary to answer your concerns and be willing to accept YOUR choice of treatment is key.

Being told you have cancer is devastating enough, learning to live with it is something totally different. No matter what type of cancer it is – we all go through a period of shock, denial, and the realization our lives have just been turned upside down. What matters most is what we do after that.

In my original article, "You've opted for Chemotherapy, now what?" I wrote my story and gave a list of things to do to help you through the initial shock.

Throughout all of this my life had changed drastically.

- My family told me I was stupid and crazy not to do the chemo and basically couldn't cope with my decision.
- My livelihood was as a computer consultant and I couldn't focus on that.
- My son had always talked about owning his own restaurant, so I did what any mother in my position would do – made the mistake of financing his restaurant to give him his first break. My rationale was if the doctors were right – it was the least I could do for him before I passed.

It seemed every decision I made in the business side of my life was wrong. I didn't think things through clearly – just kept thinking, "what if there's some truth to this short life span that my original doctors gave me?"

So, the stress from the daily grind of the restaurant took its toll on me, and my cancer spread from one area in my body to three. My visits to the doctors became more frequent

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and eventually I panicked. The two nodes on the back of my head were protruding significantly. It was time to change my thinking. “Little kids brave chemo every day; why am I being such a wussy?”

Just before the holiday season in 2004 at one of my weekly routine visits to Dr. Miller, we did our usual banter but this time instead of my saying “but not now” I looked Dr. Miller in the eye and said, “I know – but can it wait till January?” He literally fell backwards and made me repeat myself.

I knew I needed something to get me through the chemo. Before the first treatment my boyfriend and I put a plan into place to celebrate my success in being rid of the cancer. We decided on a trip to Barcelona Spain.

In January as agreed, I went in for my first round of chemo – it was a long drawn out day of 8 hours as the drugs dripped slowly into my arm. On my next scheduled office visit, we did the usual blood tests and cat scans. This time we learned 90% of the cancer had been knocked out. Hooray! This was excellent news – no full regimen. Instead we only did 4 treatments.

So from January 2005 to April 2005 I did four rounds of chemo and in May 2005 I flew to Barcelona Spain for a week’s celebration.

To this day I don’t know how much the added stress in my life with the restaurant played in spreading my Lymphoma. But I often wonder if I had just calmed down, would I’ve been able to avoid chemo altogether. One thing I firmly believe, though, is that because I had a doctor who let me go at my own pace, had an end goal in mind, and was ready for chemo - everything added up to a better result for all involved.