



Do Oncologists Care about Their Dying Patients?

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Commentary

My wife of 45 years passed away on December 8, 2016 from pancreatic cancer. This alone is not a big deal, since so many of us die of cancer, every day. In our case, we maintained two oncologists at the same time; one at the Southern Cancer Center in Mobile, Alabama, and the other at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston Texas. Our idea was to hold onto one, if for some reason the other abandons us. Actually, we had three, since our oncologist at MD Anderson sent us to another oncologist for clinical trial, also at the MD Anderson. To all three oncologists, my wife had only one request, to please let her die without pain.

On November 22, 2016, we were told that the clinical trial did not work. We did not even see our regular oncologist that day, let alone prescription for pain relief. When we returned to Mobile next day, we drove directly to our local oncologist, who told us that he agreed with the assessment by the clinical trial and added: "no drug would be helpful at this time". When we met our primary care doctor as our last resort, she gave us prescription of pain control, although we were too exhausted to even ask the prescription.

It was the early morning hours of December 4. My wife had fever, then cold, then pain, and then excruciating pain. I gave her one tablet of morphine. When she begged desperately for more, I did not give to her because I was so frightened that I would overdose her to death. Do oncologists care about their dying patients? I have no doubt that all of them will say that they do. If it is an accepted practice for oncologists not to give prescription for pain relief to their dying patients by handing the duty over conveniently to hospice nurses, maybe the oncology profession should consider changing the practice.

Reference

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Received Date: 21 Jun 2019

Accepted Date: 15 Jul 2019

Published Date: 18 Jul 2019

Citation:

Chang S. Do Oncologists Care about Their Dying Patients?. *Ann Palliat Care Med.* 2019; 1(1): 1002.

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