



Lung Cancer Survivor Shares Story of a Second Opinion

George Jackson

Lung Cancer Survivor and Patient Advocate

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Janet Freeman-Daily:

Hi. I'm Janet Freeman-Daily, a lung cancer patient and activist, and I'm here with another patient, George Jackson.

George Jackson:

Yes.

Janet Freeman-Daily:

Welcome, George.

George Jackson:

Thank you much.

Janet Freeman-Daily:

George is a stage II cancer patient, but he was originally diagnosed at stage IV.

So can you tell about that? How do you get a second opinion that makes such a difference?

George Jackson:

Well, with the initial diagnosis it was denial, anxiety. And I said, no, I'm not going to accept this. I want a second opinion, so it was that easy for me. And from there my primary physician referred me to Northwestern Hospital. They ran all of their tests, and they discovered that it was not stage IV but stage II, and the ball started to roll.

Janet Freeman-Daily:

So it's very important to get a second opinion...

George Jackson:

Second opinion.

Janet Freeman-Daily:

...from a specialist in lung cancer.

George Jackson:
Absolutely. Absolutely.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
So what would you suggest to patients who are interested in getting a second opinion? What did they need to know? What do they need to do?

George Jackson:
The first thing I would suggest is that you find a specialist in your area for cancer, not just a regular pulmonary doctor—and to gather as much information as you can about your health, the medical records, anything that you're feeling so that you can really give that doctor, most information about you so they can decide the best treatment for you.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
I know of some patients who arrived at a second opinion and found that their records had not gotten there. What records would you recommend a patient take with them?

George Jackson:
Probably all of your health records for the past two years prior to the diagnosis, because they really want to know what's going on in your life, how did you feel prior to the diagnosis, so that they can sort of develop a picture of how to track you and treat you.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
Did you also take your scans, scan reports, pathology report with you?

George Jackson:
Well, I took them, but they really wanted to take their own. It was just something that Northwestern felt comfortable doing.

So from there I felt more comfortable with the diagnosis from Northwestern although that's when the anxiety set in, the realness of it, and it's like the unknown. Where do I go from here? And so I would say to any patient, including myself, take a lot of notes, ask a lot of questions, listen to your doctors, your social workers and follow their lead.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
It can create a lot of anxiety going in for a second opinion as the reality sets in.

Did you take someone with you?

George Jackson:
Initially, yes. Well, initially, no, I went alone, because there was the first diagnosis with the pulmonary doctor. The second diagnosis here at Northwestern Hospital I took my wife, and that's when the reality of it all set in, and the depression, the anxiety.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
Absolutely.

George Jackson:
The frustration. As I said, the denial.

Janet Freeman-Daily:
So if you had had a stage IV diagnosis, your treatment would be very different than it would with stage II. Can you tell me a little bit about the difference and the impact on you and the treatment that you had?

George Jackson:

Well, with the initial diagnosis of stage IV it was just all grim. The doctor, the pulmonologist, he was so apologetic, asking me about my family members, and he seemed to express no hope. And I'm looking at him, like, are you serious? And it's like no, I'm not accepting this. I just needed another opinion, because there's always hope. You've got to be a fighter. And I'm a fighter.

So in talking to my primary physician she referred me to Northwestern, and from there I just—and meeting all of the support people from the oncology department, the doctors, I felt a lot more comfortable, more relaxed, if you can say relaxed, because you can't really relax with cancer.

George Jackson:

I initially started with chemotherapy. From there, after eight weeks of chemo I rested for six weeks, and then there was surgery. After resting another six weeks I went through radiation treatment, which was eight weeks. And after all of that, I was told that I was cancer-free.

Janet Freeman-Daily:

Awesome. So no evidence of disease and—wow. That is very hopeful.

George Jackson:

Yes. Yes, but it's a journey.

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