



NAN SUHADOLC,
patient and
cancer survivor.

ONE PATIENT'S STORY

FINDING A DOCTOR WHO ASKS THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

IN 1967 I WAS DIAGNOSED with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I was 13. At the time, doctors told my parents I only had three months to live. I underwent aggressive radiation treatment, and defied the odds. After five years, doctors said they considered me cured. Unfortunately, two decades later the cancer came back. This time it was less aggressive; a low-grade indolent lymphoma. Still, there was cancer throughout my lymphatic system. My oncologist told me it would only be a matter of time before it morphed into something more serious.

That doctor's words were in

the back of my mind when, one Sunday morning in 2002, I woke up with searing pain in my groin, the location of several lymphoma tumors. I also had overwhelming chills and a feeling of mental disconnect; it was like my state of consciousness was changing. I called my oncologist, who had me meet him at the emergency room.

When I got there, the doctor and nurses asked me questions, took my vital signs, and took a CAT scan of my groin. Then I was wheeled over to a screen and my oncologist showed me that the tumor in one node had grown from six to nine centimeters. The doctor then

informed me that my disease had undoubtedly progressed and transformed into the more aggressive strain.

He said that I needed a biopsy immediately, and that based on the tumor growth, my prognosis was grim. The biopsy was scheduled for the next day. I went home to wait. I was skeptical of my oncologist, because my body was telling me something else. I called Isaac Eliaz, M.D., a physician who specializes in integrative medicine. I had been working with him since 1998 when I met him after undergoing open heart surgery to repair radiation-induced damage to my heart.

When I called Dr. Eliaz, I found out he was at a conference in Zurich. His wife answered the phone. By strange coincidence, he called while I was on the phone with her, so she asked him to call me right back. He did. He immediately

started asking questions: "What do you feel like? What do the chills feel like? How deep are they?" He asked me to describe the pain. Then he asked what my sense was; what was my experience of what was happening to my body. His questions made my experience with this disease part of my own diagnosis and healing process.

After Dr. Eliaz talked to me and analyzed the data gleaned from the ER testing, he asked me if I had any clindamycin in the house. I did, because my artificial heart valve requires me to pre-medicate before dental work. He told me to take two tablets [the prescription had expired] that night, and another two the next morning if my symptoms lessened. He would check in with me when his flight arrived Monday.

When I woke the next day I was amazed to discover that my pain was half of what it was the day before. My chills had also significantly dissipated. Based on my progress, Dr. Eliaz diagnosed an infection and prescribed a full course of antibiotics. Within three days, my pain was gone and, more important, the inflamed lymph node had shrunk back to its original size. Dr. Eliaz saved my life by being willing to listen to me.

In the ER, there was no relationship or back-and-forth with that doctor even though he knew about me and my history. He was relating only to the objective data he was seeing, not to what I was feeling or going through. Dr. Eliaz related to objective data, too, but also to what I was saying. It's because Dr. Eliaz had the combination of the two that he saved my life. ■ —*Nan Suhadolc, as told to Karen J. Bannan*