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SURGE

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+ COSMETIC SURGERY FOUNDATION:
Annual Webster Society Gala

+ PRACTICE MANAGEMENT: Social Media



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Preparing for the Unexpected in Your Medical Practice

Part 2 of 4

As you may recall, our last segment of this medical journey left off with my wife and me making a few calls and subsequent appointments to top-notch cancer centers. We then flew out hoping to hear that the preliminary diagnosis was not as originally stated, and that our minds would be put at ease.

That was the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. At this point, my wife, a brilliant and strong cosmetic dermatologist, had become extremely weak and needed to be transported everywhere by wheelchair. We were on our way to Houston to see the specialists at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Meanwhile, our medical office at home was being run no differently than if we were on vacation. Once we returned home, we figured that we would sort things out and put together a plan then. After all, at that point, we did not know what the future would hold. The consult with the specialist was scheduled for the last day of our trip. The originating hospital near our South Florida home had already sent a tissue sample to MD Anderson, along with a copy of all of my wife's medical records from her recent hospital stay.

We were ready for the consult as the specialist walked in the door. I couldn't read his face, but I certainly didn't see a positive smile when we first introduced ourselves. I did not get the feeling I was in for good news. He explained that he had concluded with all of the tests and was prepared to explain it to us in full detail. He told us the tumors were not renal cell, and my adrenaline picked up immediately. At that time, I wasn't sure if I was happy or sad.

He explained that he and several pathologists had conferred with one another, and they could not come up with a conclusive diagnosis for the type of cell that it was. He told us that they had found cancer in the kidney, the paraaortic lymph node and

bilaterally in the lungs. He took a deep breath before looking straight at us and stated, "We also found it on your spine at T12." I looked at him and did not know what to say.

When I caught my composure, I asked him what it all meant. He responded with a question, "Are you asking me how long your wife has to live?"

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I answered in the affirmative, and he sternly replied, "Usually patients with this condition survive 12-18 months, with a 5 percent survival rate."

Remember that adrenaline I just mentioned? It came back as a triple-header and fully consumed my entire body. I froze for a few seconds before collapsing into tears. My head swam – in our home, work and family lives, we had it all and this just wasn't possible. What were we going to do now? We really didn't have our lives in order AND were not well prepared for this personally, professionally, mentally or emotionally. After I gained my composure somewhat, I asked him, "If this was your wife, would you accept that time frame?"

He replied to the negative and I simply stated, "I won't either."



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The hardest part, at this point, was that no one knew what type of tumor was taking over her body. Without that information, how can it be treated? The doctor explained that in the meantime we could opt for targeted therapy, like the oral medication Votrient. But it was very expensive and, while it wouldn't hurt, it may not work if the tumor was not a clear cell carcinoma. On the flip side, traditional chemotherapy could be seriously damaging if it not administered properly.

We were packed and headed to the airport to return home to break the news to our entire family. We looked back and forth at one another, not knowing what to say. What was there to say? We didn't know what hit us, and now we would have to make decisions when we don't know what we don't know.

We finally returned home from an extremely somber flight, only to have to face our family, friends and staff of 19, all anxiously awaiting us to assure them that everything would be okay. How do we even know how and what to say without showing the fear in our own faces? You don't, and you just have to present the information in the best and most positive manner possible, regardless of the potential outcome. We cannot upset the apple cart, because we still have to move full steam ahead.

The next article in the series will describe the many steps you need to take to protect yourself from the financial, professional and legal devastation that awaits you. I've learned through all this that you can never be too protected or too prepared. Outside of your health, safety and protection of assets, legal and accounting are the most important things to consider right now. To be continued in the next issue of *Surge...*

