

Waiting and Worrying — PET can help



“Cancer patients say that one of the toughest things about the disease is the waiting. You wait for an appointment, you wait in the doctor’s office, you wait for a diagnostic procedure, you wait for the results, and you wait for treatment and its results. And then it’s likely you will be told they don’t know for sure, and recommend that you wait while they monitor progress.”

PET scans don’t, of course, eliminate the waiting or the worrying, but they do go a long way to alleviate delays and to provide answers more accurately. PET (positron emission tomography) is the best diagnostic technique there is for providing accurate answers in the detection and treatment of most types of cancer. The earlier cancer is detected, the more effectively it can be dealt with. And that goes

for detection of metastases (spread) of cancer and recurrence of cancer as well.

One of the most agonizing waits is when a cancer patient is undergoing treatment. Radiation therapy and chemotherapy are cruel. The uncertainty as to whether it is working adds to the stress, and nothing is more depressing than getting to the end of a debilitating treatment only to find that it wasn’t successful.

PET scans are used after a course of treatment to monitor progress. A doctor trained to read PET scans can determine whether the disease is being eradicated by a course of treatment or whether something else should be tried. It is a happy day at the PETSCAN Centre when a lymphoma patient, for example, completes chemotherapy treatment and the PET scan shows total absence of disease.

Here is what Fran, a cancer survivor, has told us about waiting: *“At the time I found out I had cancer, I lived in a different city from my family doctor. That of course made the waiting process longer while I looked for a surgeon and then went hunting for a general practitioner. It took 5 weeks waiting for surgery, not knowing how severe my cancer was. In addition, I waited another 6 weeks to begin my chemotherapy and yet another wait to begin radiation.*

The whole process took 9 months; most of it spent waiting. Waiting for information has got to be one of the most difficult things to do because the mind fills in the blanks with imagined information. And the imagined information is usually centered on the worst-case scenario and creates undue stress. Had I been able to have a PET scan immediately I would have known within hours the extent of my cancer. I would have known the truth and the truth is always more acceptable than not knowing anything.” ■

A PET Scan:

- Is safe and there are no side effects;
- Can replace multiple medical procedures with a single exam;
- Can reduce or eliminate futile or unnecessary treatments;
- Can help with the planning of, or entirely eliminate, surgery;
- Can validate or alter patient care;
- Is done in less than three hours;
- Provides interpretations within 48 hours to your doctor.

Previous Articles

In our series of articles about PET, we have discussed so far the following topics:

1. PET – General Introduction (June 8)
2. The Vancouver PETSCAN Centre (June 15)
3. Use of PET in Lung Cancer (June 22)
4. Use of PET in Breast Cancer (June 29)
5. Use of PET in Colorectal Cancer (July 13)
6. Use of PET in Melanoma (July 27)
7. Use of PET in Lymphoma (August 10)
8. PET and the Health Care System (August 24)
9. A Patient’s Guide for PET Scans (Sept. 7)
10. Why Use PET? (Sept. 21)

If you didn’t have a chance to pick up a copy of any of these issues, you can find the articles on the PETSCAN Centre’s website: www.petscan.ca/news.htm

Full-body clinical PET scans are available at the Vancouver PETSCAN Centre.



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