

Imaging People, Touching Lives with PET— Part 1



There were some dramatic personal stories about PET at a Town Hall Meeting sponsored by the US Health Care Financing Administration. Here is Kim's story (with thanks to Diagnostic Imaging Magazine).

Kim knew something wasn't right, no matter what the mammograms, sonograms (ultrasound) and doctors said. She had an unmistakable lump in her breast. Her doctors agreed, but the imaging studies showed nothing amiss.

"For two years I complained about a lump I had found in my breast. The people at the Breast Center said they would watch it, but they thought it was nothing."

When she moved, she had another mammogram and another sonogram, both of which showed no evidence of anything suspicious.

Her new physician shared her concern and recommended a biopsy.

"Then my boss suggested that I get a PET scan. I had never heard of PET. My boss told me about how it actually measured biology and was totally different from other imaging studies. I had a PET scan. Sure enough, the lump lit up like a Christmas tree and it was huge."

Kim subsequently had a double mastectomy, and is convinced the scan is the reason she is alive.

"If I had continued to listen to people who wanted to watch and wait, I would be dead now. Part of

the problem is that mammography does not pick up certain types of breast cancers. Also, it was not picked up on the sonogram, which was very disconcerting to me. Realistically, PET saved my life. The issue for me was that when nothing else picked up my breast cancer, there was another alternative."

A work colleague of Kim also had breast cancer. After initial therapy, follow-up tests showed rising cancer markers. "Her oncologist said she probably had metastatic disease. CT and MRI showed nothing to indicate she had metastatic disease, yet her oncologist knew something was wrong. She talked her doctors into letting her have a PET scan, and it showed she had recurrence in the same breast. That's a whole different story from metastatic disease."

"The issue that I have tried to impress on people is that all cancer is curable if you get to it early enough, but you can't cure it if you can't see it."

The mother of two daughters, Kim said her close call with breast cancer has given her a new appreciation for life and for the things that matter to her.

"Breast cancer absolutely changed my life, and PET imaging played a big role in that change."

Once again, PET made a difference. As Kim said, you can't cure it if you can't see it. With a PET scan, you have the best chance to see it. ■

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.

Previous Articles

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)
11. Waiting and Worrying (Oct. 5)
12. PET from a Surgeon's Perspective (Oct. 19)
13. Head and Neck Cancer - PET Can Help (Nov. 2)

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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