



A Family Torn Apart

Whose Decision Is It To Treat Cancer?

by Ronda Behnke ND, CHomP, RN

Harry looked terrible. Granted, he was 73, but with him walking hunched over, being paler than the freshly-fallen snow and his incessant pulling at his waistband to keep his pants from falling down left few people in doubt that he did not feel well.



He was in pain, wasn't eating, wasn't sleeping, and too tired to play with his grandchildren. And he was worried.

He wasn't the only one. So were his girlfriend, each of his eight children, their spouses, and the majority of his twenty-six grandchildren.

All they wanted was for Harry to have chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy to extend his life.

His daughter Karen suspected prostate cancer. Of course mom had died of breast cancer when she was 42, so of course it had to be cancer right?

All the signs were there: pelvic and low back pain, weight loss, fatigue and frequent urination, especially at night. It had to be cancer; could it be anything else?

Karen was, after all, the family medical expert. She was an occupational therapist, used to be an LPN seven years ago. She always had the final say whenever health issues arose in the family. Anyone who consulted Karen was told her opinion and her recommendations, and she made sure you followed them, even if you didn't agree with them. Harry was sick; therefore, Karen felt he needed to go to the doctor.

So Karen took Harry to see a medical doctor. Harry told the doctor about his pain and

increased need to urinate. Being a man over 50 as Harry was, a routine Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test was done to check for prostate cancer. It was elevated, indicating the possibility for prostate cancer. Then Karen took Harry to see a urologist, as specialist who deals with prostate and urinary problems. A Digital Rectal Exam (DRE) was done by this physician to feel the prostate gland by inserting a finger in Harry's rectum. Harry was in enough pain without having this done!

The urologist stated he was 99% certain Harry had prostate cancer and that it had spread to the bone. His recommendation was both prostate and bone biopsies. Harry refused. The doctor told him to think about it; but until he made the decision to have these procedures, the urologist refused to treat Harry, even to give him something for pain.

Because the urologist suspected cancer, immediately most of the family did as well. The family began to plan around Harry's "condition." Making future plans became difficult because dad had cancer and may die during their vacation time. They began to plan family events so everyone could get together a few times before dad died.

Several of his children pushed for him to have biopsies because they needed to hear

from the doctor how long dad had to live. And they wanted Harry to have chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy to extend his life. In their eyes, Harry had cancer that had spread; therefore, his condition was terminal. The only thing they needed to know from the doctor was how long until Harry died.

But Harry refused medical treatments of any kind, and refused the biopsies. What was the point of having a biopsy if he wasn't going to do any of the treatments? Harry asked. He had seen his wife suffer when she had chemotherapy and radiation therapy when she had breast cancer. He stated she suffered her last days. He refused to suffer *his* last days.

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Harry found that his pain decreased and he was able to sleep more soundly after having reflexology that was provided by his son Peter. Peter did not look at his father as someone who was going to die soon. He treated Harry as if he was going to live a long time yet. They rarely talked about cancer or even about

the symptoms Harry was having. When they were together, Peter focused on life, not death.

Harry began to tell family members about the improvements he was having with reflexology. It began to cause a rift within the family. Several of Harry's children did not want Peter to do reflexology, fearing it would cause the cancer to spread quicker. They also wanted Harry to have the biopsy, so if he was feeling better, he would be more adamant about not having the procedure done. All Peter wanted to do was help his father to be more comfortable, no matter what was his actual diagnosis. He pointed this out to those who called, asking, "Don't you want him to feel better?"

His daughter Karen was determined to get Harry to undergo the biopsies and treatments, and to have Peter stop doing reflexology on Harry. She pushed for Harry to sign a Power of Attorney of Healthcare, designating herself as the person to make decisions for him about his healthcare. He agreed with some of the statements, such as not prolonging his life through artificial means, but did not want Karen to determine what needed to be done. He discussed the decisions with his eldest son and made him the Power of Attorney of Healthcare.

Despite Harry's decision, several daughters continued to push for the biopsy. Even the grandchildren began to question his decision. One of the younger grandchildren had asked, "Why are you afraid to go to the doctor?" Harry had no answer to give the child.

It wasn't that he was afraid of the doctor; it was that he saw no reason to see a medical doctor when he wasn't going to follow the doctor's recommendations.

She also found that out of 1 million men who had received biopsies after having a high PSA reading, 75% of them did not have prostate cancer.

During a visit with Peter and his fiancé, Harry was asked something no one had asked him to that point: what he wanted. He stated that he did not want medical treatments. Harry knew he was going to die someday, whether it was from cancer or just plain life. He did not expect to live forever. He only wanted to have more energy and less pain, with the focus being to have more energy. He wanted a good quality of life, not necessarily a longer life.

Peter's girlfriend, Leia, was a Healer, a practitioner of the natural healing arts. Leia was a Naturopathic Doctor and Classical Homeopath. She was currently enhancing her career as a freelance writer, primarily writing health-related research articles that either focused on medical or natural health, or some combination of the two. Leia agreed to research prostate health and let Harry know her findings.

During her research, Leia was surprised to learn that the PSA test gave too many false positives and negatives, leaving many doctors considering other options for prostate cancer screening. She also found that out of 1 million men who had received biopsies after having a high PSA reading, 75% of them did not have prostate cancer. There were eight causes besides cancer that could cause an elevated PSA level, including a prostate infection and an enlarged prostate, also known as Benign Prostatic Hypertrophy (BPH).

Leia already knew many natural modalities and supplements that could help a man with an enlarged prostate, even prostate cancer. Her research into the medical aspect of treating prostate concerns cleared many questions in her mind (and created a few new ones). Leia began to wonder if Harry had cancer or not, as her research indicated that prostate cancer yielded no symptoms, but the symptoms that Harry had were more indicative of either an enlarged prostate or an infected prostate. In the end, it really didn't matter. Leia did not need a diagnosis to make recommendations for improved health.

Harry did not say he wanted to have his cancer cured—if he did have cancer—he said he wanted more energy and less pain, with the priority being more energy. Pain was a

part of life, he said. Being in pain was something he could live with. To that end, she made recommendations of herbs, dietary supplements and homeopathy. The most important recommendation was Essiac Tea which has helped millions of people with all forms of cancer. Leia also made a special Saw Palmetto jam for Harry to help with his enlarged prostate issues.

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Peter also continued to do hand and foot reflexology nearly every day because Peter knew that reflexology did not cause cancer to spread; and, it also helped Harry feel better.

Within three days, Harry noticed a change: he had more energy and

increased interest in food (so he was eating more). His pain had also decreased, and was no longer constant. He stated he was sleeping better, getting up only twice each night to use the bathroom. Peter and Leia noticed he was no longer walking stooped over, and he had more color in his cheeks. One of Harry's sons stated he was talking louder and appeared to have more energy.

Leia made an article out of her medical findings, which Peter sent to each of his siblings, hoping to educate them about natural healing methods.

After taking the natural supplements for a week, Harry stated he was feeling better: had less pain and more energy. He told everyone who came to see him of his improved quality of life.

But several of his children weren't convinced that homeopathy, the natural supplements or the reflexology was helping. They became upset because if Harry was feeling better, he would see no reason to have chemotherapy, and they saw chemotherapy as the only way to cure the cancer. Several of the family members went to talk to Leia and Peter, telling Leia to stay away from their father as she was not a real member of the family and had no right to practice witchcraft on their father. It was also stated that voodoo medicine would not help and would only cause Harry to avoid medical care.

So Leia had to stay away from Harry, but Peter could not be so ordered as he was a

son of Harry. But Karen told Peter to stop doing reflexology as she now made the health decisions from Harry and she wanted him to do chemotherapy. Since Karen didn't want Harry to take natural supplements, she removed them from the house and threw them away.

Although Harry didn't return to the medical doctor for more tests, Karen was able to get approval for hospice. The hospice personnel brought pain medications for Harry. Karen was also able to get a few prescriptions for other medication that she added to the lot from hospice.

One day during a visit by Peter, Harry stated he was very ill because of all the drugs he had to take. Peter called the list of drugs to Leia; it was discovered that one of the drugs was a chemotherapeutic agent. When Peter told Harry, Harry became angry because his wishes weren't being honored by his family. He had thought he was only taking pain medications and something for anxiety.

So he stopped taking all medication because he didn't want anyone tricking him into taking chemotherapy. Hence the rift grew in the family again, as it was Peter & Leia's "interference" that caused Harry to turn away from his drugs.

As Harry now had no natural supplements, his health began to again deteriorate. As Harry learned of his family taking items and determining the distribution of his assets, he gave up living. Within 3 months he died.

The damage caused by hurt feelings in the family remained however. Those who thought chemotherapy was the only way to treat Harry's cancer, or keep him alive a little longer, blamed Harry's death on those who had given him natural supplements and care. Those natural health practitioners involved were embittered by the words spoken while Harry was still alive. And those who were in the middle without an opinion were just saddened by the way the family was torn apart.

In the end, the biggest lesson that was missed by some was that Harry had the right to determine how he was going to live his life and how he was going to manage his health care. Those who wanted him to have chemotherapy didn't ask Harry what he wanted to do for his health—they decided that Harry needed to be alive for as long as possible even

if it meant he'd suffer an extra 6 months because of chemotherapy. But what Harry wanted was a better quality of life; he wanted his remaining days to be filled with smiles, family and less suffering.

In the end, what he got was suffering as he watched his family being torn apart by his decision.

Disclaimer: The information provided by Dr. Ronda is for educational purposes only. It is important that you not make health decisions or stop any medication without first consulting your personal physician or health care provider.

Dr. Ronda Behnke is a distinguished practitioner of Classical Homeopathy and Natural Healing methods. Amongst her clients, she is known for her exceptional insight and non-judgmental presence. You can contact Dr. Ronda via the website www.HomeopathicCentersofAmerica.org or by calling 920-321-0008. "When it's time to heal, call me...I will listen to you." For a FREE guide to help you along your healing path, visit the HCA website noted above.

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