

**House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce: Subcommittee on Health
Medical Radiation Hearing: February 26, 2010
Suzanne Lindley Testimony**

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you very much for your invitation to testify at this hearing today on medical radiation. As a current resident of Canton, Texas, I'd also like to say a special hello to my fellow Texans on the Committee: Congressmen Green, Gonzalez, Hall and Burgess. I am honored to be here to share my experience as a cancer survivor and patient advocate.

To put it simply – I would not be here today without medical imaging technology and advances in radiation therapy.

My battle with cancer began in 1998, when I was only 31 years old. It was then that I was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer – the most advanced stage of the disease. I found out that the cancer had already spread to my liver and I was told that I had just six months to live.

For a short time, I thought that was it. My husband and I were planning Thanksgiving as if it would be my last holiday with our family and I posted a note to the Association of Cancer Online Resources (ACOR) list-serv, asking for guidance from other cancer patients on how to tell my two young daughters that I would not be around for much longer. Sadly, in many ways, I was overlooking the fact that I was still very much alive.

Rather than answering my question, I was fortunate that one of the patients who responded to my post – Shelly Weiler – urged me to get a second opinion instead.

With little time left, I did just that and started receiving what was the only therapy for colon cancer available at that time – chemotherapy (5fu). I cycled through many different types of chemo, often seeing short term results, only to then see the cancer grow stronger. When I was out of approved chemotherapy options, I turned to clinical trials.

My liver tumors began to grow and multiply. They were innumerable.....like the stars lighting the sky at night. My stomach was swollen, my skin was yellowing, and I was exhausted. Every breath, every move was difficult. After my all-too-brief reprieve of hope, I suddenly found myself back at square one. I was told that there were no more options and that I should come accept that my condition was terminal.

This time the prognosis was even more dire -- the doctors predicted that I had about three months to live.

We once again prepared family and I sent out an email to all of my friends letting them know that I had reached the end of the line. Then, after planning my funeral, picking out my casket and calling hospice, I received a call from one of those friends. "There is a new treatment that can save your life," he told me, urging me to call his oncologist in Wisconsin who had been using Selective Internal Radiation Therapy – tiny little radioactive beads that are implanted in tumors to reduce and eliminate cancer.

It sounded good. It sounded too good. With only three months, I was hesitant -- to say the least. I was afraid to get my hopes up again. My friend was persistent. He called dozens of times, and finally I relented. It turns out that I was a good candidate for the procedure.

I went back to my oncologist and told him about Selective Internal Radiation Therapy, expecting him to be excited. Instead he told me that he didn't think it would work – but then added “what do you have to lose?”

I received the outpatient treatment, called radioembolization (I call them little magic beads) in January, 2005 and over a six-month period saw a 65 percent reduction in my liver tumors as well as necrosis (or dying) of those tumors. More than that, the fluid in my belly started to disappear, my color returned, and my energy was back!!

I really began to live!

I learned to scuba dive. I have been sky diving. I have connected with other survivors, and have met people and shared experiences that I would have never seen had it not been for this very disease that will eventually end my life.

Since then, I have continued with systemic chemotherapy and I have also received additional targeted radiation treatments to stay ahead of the curve with my disease. I have received external beam radiation for spinal metastases (cancer that spread to my spine) – which has given me good pain control and enhanced my quality of life. I have also benefited from Gamma Knife, which treated a metastatic brain lesion, radio frequency ablation for a single returning liver tumor, and Cyberknife for my associated lung tumors (again keeping me one step ahead of the tumor growth).

Together, these advanced radiation therapy technologies have allowed me to watch my daughters grow up – to see them walk across the stage for their graduations, to start college, to become adults. Today they are 19 and 22. These technologies have also allowed me to walk hand in hand with my husband and will, hopefully, allow us to share our rocking chair days together.

I count myself blessed to be a cancer survivor during such a revolutionary time in the world of cancer treatments and to have been able to benefit from such amazing innovation. What these technologies are able to do, and what they have done for me, is nothing short of miraculous. They have turned miniscule moments into magical milestones.

Today, I still have tumors here, there, and everywhere. I continue to receive systemic chemotherapy and will continue to use targeted radiological therapies when needed. Cancer, for me, is chronic and not terminal thanks in a large part to procedures using medical radiation. These existing treatments, and ongoing cancer research and medical innovation, will be a part of my life until there is a cure for cancer.

Before I close, I'd like to leave you with this thought:

As my personal story makes painfully clear, there are enough barriers already out there, keeping patients from effective treatments: patients thinking, like I did, that they're at the end of the road, when in reality, there are not. The last thing we need is to add yet another barrier by invoking unwarranted fear about the radiation used in these miraculous procedures.

Thank you!