

When Sally received a **cancer diagnosis**, “I was scared.”

Medical information, second opinion and support helped Sally cope



When Sally reflects on her experiences after being diagnosed with follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and the information and support she received from her Medical Ally team, she can actually crack a joke now: “When you're told the ‘C’ word (cancer), you don't just call up your girlfriend and ask, ‘Who's your oncologist?’” she chuckles.

Sally can joke about it today, but it was scary and disturbing when she first noticed an unusual “raised ridge” on her lower right abdomen in October 2017. “At the time, I was working out with a trainer at the gym and lifting heavier than normal weights,” she explains. “I wondered if I may have stressed or pulled something, but it wasn't sore. I wondered if it could be a hernia.”

When Sally showed her husband the odd protuberance on her right side that was not apparent on her left, he too was concerned and agreed she should have it checked by their primary care doctor. When the doctor looked at Sally's lower abdomen, she said, “‘Oh my gosh,’ and she asked me to lie down on the table. She started getting serious about examining me, and I point-blank asked her, ‘Do you think it could be cancer?’ She replied, ‘That's what we need to look at.’” Appointments and tests moved rapidly over the next two weeks – CT scans and biopsies. “The following Thursday, the general surgeon's office called to confirm the biopsy came back as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma,” says Sally.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

Lymphoma is a cancer of the immune system called the lymph system. Lymph nodes are pea-sized glands in the neck, groin and under the arms. There are more than 60 types of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a group of blood cancers. With follicular lymphoma, sick blood cells can travel to many parts of the body, such as organs, bone marrow and lymph nodes.

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Sally never imagined that she would be the one who would need ConsumerMedical's help. She received a mailer in early 2017 that described ConsumerMedical's services. A few things caught her attention: information about your condition, treatment options, and questions to ask the doctor. “My husband off and on has had nagging lower back pain, so I put the mailer on our refrigerator for future reference.”

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With questions swimming in her head, Sally grabbed the mailer and called ConsumerMedical. “The woman who answered the phone was very pleasant,” says Sally. “That made me feel good. I was scared. When I explained why I was calling, she transferred me to a Nurse Ally.” The Nurse Ally became Sally’s expert advocate and compassionate support system for the next few months. “I had no idea how many times I would call her (Sally estimates 12-15 calls and emails from October 2017 through January 2018) or how truly helpful and supportive the services would be.”

Sally shared three examples:

- “I didn’t know what type of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma I had, so my Nurse Ally asked me to request the pathology report.” The Nurse Ally called Sally after her appointment, and once they knew the proper diagnosis, helped her to determine next steps.
- “She told me I had every right to get a second opinion, even if I liked the oncologist my primary doctor referred me to.” Her Medical Ally team sent Sally a binder with information on follicular non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma along with background on oncologists located near her home and at the Mayo Clinic in Phoenix, so she could schedule a second opinion.
- “A friend suggested I watch a documentary on cancer, and it scared me to death. I called my Nurse Ally and she talked me off the ledge. She said, ‘There is a lot of incorrect information out there. I’ll bet on science any day of the week. Don’t watch shows or surf the internet. Only use your binder.’ That was exactly what I needed to hear.”

Sally’s appointment with the oncologist referred by her doctor left her with even more questions. “He had just gotten back from vacation the night before and he was yawning during our visit.” Based on the stage of Sally’s lymphoma, and that no organs were involved, the oncologist recommended she “watch and wait” and hold off on treatment.

Sally and her husband then went to Mayo and met with two oncologists “we absolutely loved. They explained everything, and even drew pictures of how the medication works. The bottom line is, their recommendation was the same as the first oncologist, so everything checked out.” Sally refers to her ConsumerMedical binder as, “My Bible. I brought it with me to work and made notes in it during my calls with my Nurse Ally. Whenever I think of questions, I flip through it for answers.”

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knows what she’s talking about.”***

The great news is, “my last two scans showed marked improvement. Some lymph nodes that showed up before are not showing up, and others have continued to shrink. And my blood tests are good. My oncologist said if things are still improving in October, we may push the next scan out a year.”

Reflecting on her experiences, Sally says, “I had a lot of confidence in my Nurse Ally. I felt somebody is helping me through this. She cares ... kind of like a friend, but a friend who knows what she’s talking about. It meant a lot.”

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