

The Call You Never Expected: What to Do When Your Parent Faces A Cancer Diagnosis

Life happens fast. You move through the motions of a regular Monday. Your cell phone rings during lunch- its Mom. She cries. Dad's sick. Your gut recoils. Cancer eats up your family with worry. Reality blurs into shock. The details of your daily life fade away. All you think about is your Dad—your Mom—life and death.

A parent's cancer diagnosis can shatter your life as you know it. Within twenty-four hours, you embrace challenges and blessings of a caregiver life. Many families facing cancer must decide which doctor, treatment plan, and cancer hospital the parent should choose—fast. Some top cancer hospitals such as the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center or the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center can have six-to-eight week waiting lists to see a doctor.

When my father was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2000, my sister and I immediately booked a flight home to be with my parents. Within one week, we learned everything we could about non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and made the best educated decision regarding Dad's immediate treatment. The choices bogged our minds. Dad's diseased strengthened every minute we waited.

Everyone's situation is different. After the experience my sister and I went through with my Dad's cancer treatment, I would do a few things differently. Consider the following three suggestions and resources when your parent confronts a new cancer diagnosis.

Don't mess around.

Time is of the essence with cancer. Encourage your parent to see the best doctor he or she can get in to see as soon as possible. Check out the [U.S. News and World's Report on the Best Cancer Hospitals](#) to help your parent find the best doctor for his or her particular type of cancer.

Consider hiring outside research assistance.

The amount of health information available online and in bookstores is staggering. If you find yourself crunched for time, consider hiring a virtual assistant through [AssistU](#) or the [International Virtual Assistants Association](#) to research cancer treatments, doctors, or alternative treatments for your parent's disease.

Take time out for yourself.

It's very easy to get completely absorbed in researching your parent's disease and searching for treatments. Make sure you exercise (even if only an easy walk around the block), eat healthy foods, drink plenty of water and get as much rest as you can. Get additional caregiver self-care tips on Web sites such as the [National Center on Caregiving](#), [National Alliance for Caregiving](#), or the [National Family Caregivers Association](#).

Circumstances are the rulers of the weak; they are but the instruments of the wise

-Samuel Lover

Jamieson Haverkamp is the author of *Mom Minus Dad: The Essential Resource Guide for Busy Adults with a Newly Widowed Parent* (Blooming Women Press, LLC, May 2008) — the only resource guide available with more than 500 resources for adults with a newly widowed parent. Ms. Haverkamp assisted her family in choosing a treatment plan for her father after his diagnosis of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma that included chemotherapy at Massey Cancer Center, radiation and a stem cell transplant at Georgetown Hospital and a clinical trial at M.D. Anderson Cancer hospital. To learn more about the book and the author, visit www.momminusdad.com. © 2008 Jamieson Haverkamp

