

Patients Should Not Be A Serial Number

I learn a lot from patients who come to see us for a second opinion or are seeking a clinical trial. A common theme in complaints, especially those who were treated initially at large institutions and academic centers, is that they felt they were just another patient with a serial number. Individuality and personalized care should mean just that, personalized.

Every patient is unique as is every cancer. A unique patient is who she or he is, their emotions, lifestyle, life and existence philosophy, family and hobbies, how they see quality of life and goals in life. Knowing those things requires that the oncologist and the care team know the patient as a unique individual like no one else. No two people are the same except possibly identical twins.

Likewise, every cancer is unique, two hormone dependent breast cancers are not the same, oncologists know the general natural history of a cancer group, but each cancer, although under the microscope and genetic testing might be identical, there are always differences that have to be taken into account when decisions and recommendations for treatment are made.

Moreover, I have been fortunate to have had a formal training in pathology and hematology in Scotland. I have seen the enemy under the microscope and still do that on regular bases, that has been probably the best thing I have done in my long career as a medical oncologist and a hematologist. I have learned that no two cancers are the same, never.

Both items put together “patient and cancer cell individuality” should make care individual. In my experience and opinion that goal can only be achieved in small institutions where patients are unique humans not a numbered individual.

By Dr. Nashat Gabrail