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What is the Big Deal About Centers of Excellence?

A government-defined Center of Excellence, beginning in the mid-1960s, is a facility or organization that creates healthcare value above the average found in a specific location. In the late 1990s, the US Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) began to examine and compare treatment outcomes among hospitals paid by Medicare. Other divisions of government as well as the private sector have developed their own systems for rating and/or developing Healthcare Centers of Excellence.

As an example, The United States Federal Government established national centers of excellence in health care in the 1990s through their Department of Health and Human Services. Since that time, other new systems of Centers of Excellence have emerged, including a system of medical centers under the supervision of the US Veterans Administration and a system developed by insurance companies. Other systems exist as well and the healthcare consumer is wise to investigate the history, development, and certification rationale for any medical or healthcare "center of excellence." *They are not all the same.*

By exploring this option, my husband, Dan is alive. I have a duty to share our story with each and every one of you. The lessons that we learned through his journey in 2008 have already made a difference not only to our family but several friends and clients. We learned the genetic patterns for family health history and the cutting edge of what may be in the future for our children and grandchildren. They also now have valuable resources that they may not have discovered on their own.

Dan is the typical "blue eyed blonde". He has had a 30 year history of basal cell skin cancer. His mother had the same situation and four of his five children are now diagnosed and have received treatment! What started as a very small "bump" under his left jaw was a *squamous cell* skin cancer. This did not hurt, did not have any color and could have very easily been ignored. Don't ignore your body if it is telling you something is different than a norm for you! His dermatologist that he has used for over 30 years sent him to an ENT for a biopsy and was then referred to a local oncologist/hematologist. After many tests and about three weeks came the answer... A Death Wish.

Dan was diagnosed as Stage 4, bi-lateral cancer of the lungs – inoperable/terminal with 4 to 6 months left. This was July 2008. In the upcoming months ahead, the youngest daughter was to be married at St. John's Church, Creighton campus; we had to develop a strategy to tell five children, twelve grandchildren and five great-grandchildren and the legal work needed an immediate review. Dan was scheduled to receive chemotherapy starting the following week.

We took the next day to analyze our situation along with a very dear family friend (our doctor since I was a teenager – just yesterday!) and our loyal attorney. *There was just something about this that was not right.* Our doctor asked us to please do not take treatment, go to University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX. I immediately made a self-referral, confirmed insurance and off we went. We had 12 round trips to Houston in 2 yrs – travel expenses compare to the cost of a new car...vs. life – no big deal. Out of pocket medical expenses were \$124 –near \$1,000,000 costs incurred!

End result – NO lung cancer at all – no lung biopsy had been done here! Dan had extensive head/neck surgery, walked the daughter down the aisle, and went back to Houston for six weeks of chemotherapy and radiation. He has no facial nerve damage and has resumed life as he knew his "norm" to be. All checkups are good. Amazing!!!

Moral of the Story - Don't sell yourself short by carrying "bargain" insurance - always get a second opinion outside of the state that you reside – go to a center of excellence for your "specific" diagnosis rather than a "general" hospital.

Your health and your dollars are precious – call me for a free consultation! The right "fit" for you and your health insurance makes a difference! *

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