

My diagnostic Triumph

A Matter of Life and Death

By Clément Vézina, MD

The sharp, intense pain in the 49-year-old woman's abdomen convinced her that death from cancer was imminent. Upon examination, what I saw was almost beyond belief.

From the moment I stepped into Mrs. J.'s house I knew something was strange. For several weeks there were rumours about Mrs. J. One day, she arrived in the postmaster's office with a frenzied look on her face and bluntly announced her imminent death. She complained of a heavy, painful "mass" growing in her abdomen.

At 49, and a bit overweight, Mrs. J. had never really been sick except for a few episodes of influenza or indigestion. A single woman most of her adult life, she had recently married a well-to-do carpenter. As far as anyone knew, they were living a comfortable and happy life.

As spring approached Mrs. J. began experiencing persistent headaches and nausea. Then came the sensation of "heaviness" in her abdomen. She became afraid as her weight increased. Mrs. J. did not have much of an education. Nevertheless, she was curious about everything and read voraciously, especially articles about health. According to what she had read, it was now clear to her that she was suffering from cancer — maybe even an "inoperable" cancer. The expectation of certain death became a way of life for her.

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One morning, she received confirmation of her impending death — sharp, intense pain in her abdomen which almost made her faint. Exasperated, her friends, the pastor and anybody else she talked to about her condition told her to consult a physician. She refused, insisting that nothing could be done. Even her husband could not convince her to see the doctor.

One night, events took their own course and she began to suffer heavy blood loss and regular, intense pain.

Distressed and afraid, her husband called me immediately. As I went into her bedroom, she became wracked by the most horrible pain she had ever felt and she doubled over, almost convulsing. She managed to say, “ Doctor, help me. I’m going to die. My cancer is growing out from my abdomen.”

This surprising cry for help made me question her mental condition. Still, she appeared to be in shock. I proceeded to make a thorough examination and discovered a grossly overweight body and traces of water and blood on the lower limbs.

Years of medical practice told me to overlook first impressions, for they are often misleading. I asked Mrs. J. to stretch her legs so that I could go on with my examination. What I saw was beyond belief — she was extended 5 cm. Instead of being at the point of death Mrs. J. was on the point of giving birth to a beautiful baby girl.

Mrs. J. survived despite suffering from severe hemorrhaging and cardiac arrhythmia. The child is now 27 years old. 

We want to hear from you!

Tell us about your Diagnostic Triumph!

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Thanks!