



STRIVE For Communication

Life Changing News

A soft touch on my shoulder in the early Saturday morning hours brought a whisper of breathing concerns from Michael. Communication was our strength in sustaining our 30 years of marriage but now I was getting chopped messages of concern. Trying to determine the course of action was difficult as it flowed from alarm to comforting me that everything was alright.

By mid morning we exited the urgent care facility with Michael breathing smoothly and with orders to see our general physician. On Monday Michael was in the hospital having excess fluid drained from his lung. Questions flowed to the doctor and nurses as to what was the cause without any response. This cryptic medical communications would begin our first hand-off challenge on our health care journey.

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The breaking news came days later: Michael had Stage IV lung cancer with no cure. The oncologist flowed into the next steps without a pause. Michael had mentally left the room as he gazed upward and didn't hear a word the doctor was saying. Now I understand why cancer patients have a champion to guide their shocking and difficult journey.

No Questions = Limited Information

Although we heard the terminal news our minds grabbed hope for remission. At the protocol treatment we asked the nurse what the plan was for ... remission? An ominous nod was the only response we got. Direct answers were not a luxury on our journey. We learned if we didn't ask questions we were given limited information.

Our life success was built on good plans and now we were walking blind. Michael strictly focused on his positive mindset on this journey. I navigated us through the hand-offs of providers; the information maze, and the communication barriers. We realized our research and questions for knowledge would make or break us. On the beginning of our journey we wanted to understand the performance markers so we could see the progress Michael made. The baffled look indicated this request was not common but our enthusiasm got us critical knowledge for our medical journey.

Communication Challenge

Ideally a cancer journey would be beneficial if all of our services were under one health care system. In fact cancer treatment centers promote a holistic communication approach with nurse navigators and case workers who guide your journey. Unfortunately a large percent of patients will cross over multiple health care systems at some time on their journey. For example, our radiology, emergency care, ambulance provider and physician specialists were not under one health care system.

Navigating the communication gap is critical for success. It was valuable to have a full view of Michael's treatment and progress. We designed a system for gathering and organizing our information to enhance our communication with our health care providers.



For example, Michael had a lung drainage tube to drain his fluid daily. I noticed a log sheet in our discharge bag with no instructions. I took the lead to record the fluid drainage on this log sheet. When the drainage tube got clogged this was a vital communications tool to raise the red flag to our doctor.

STRIVE for Quality Communication

As a champion and advocate for Michael, I was constantly navigating the communication gap so I could get him off the side roads and back on the main health care road for his survival. As you can appreciate, this is only a thumbnail of the real communication issues we faced.

Our national communications framework incorporates a number of components and checkpoints for patients. We learned, a stage IV cancer patient cannot tolerate a poor communications hand-off as it can potentially shut down their chemotherapy, the key lifeline in their cancer battle.

STRIVE Commitment

STRIVE Michael is our commitment and platform to drive quality and affordable care for high-risk patients. Join me as I share how we navigated the health care system to avoid landmines and to stay on course.

To learn more about our efforts for health care change, please visit StriveInc.org. To be part of our force for change, share your story with me at kmcclelland@striveinc.org. We must unite to **STRIVE** for the best quality care for our loved ones.