Quarantined at Sea and Now at Home and Still No Access to Chemo

Kari Kolstoe, is finally home but still can’t get treatment for her advanced neuroendocrine cancer.

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What was supposed to be a relaxing time away from the burdens of cancer treatment has only compounded the stress for Kari Kolstoe, 60, whose quarantine on the Grand Princess cruise liner due to a coronavirus outbreak delayed her from returning home to continue her treatment, according to CNN. Now, her local paper, the Grand Forks Herald, reports that she has returned home but has still not worked out how to access chemotherapy.

Kolstoe, who lives with her husband in Grand Forks, North Dakota, was diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer 18 months ago. The disease originates in the gastrointestinal tract and leads to what are known as carcinoid tumors throughout the body.

Her story is a case study for ways that the rapidly emerging coronavirus pandemic may interfere with needed cancer treatment. Some hospitals in affected areas such as Seattle and New York City have already begun to delay nonurgent cancer surgeries, according to The New York Times. For people with cancer who are quarantining at home, such as Kolstoe, the issues can become complicated.

In addition to receiving four rounds of chemotherapy, Kolstoe had her ovaries removed in January. Her cancer has spread nevertheless.

The tumors covering Kolstoe’s liver, she reports, make sitting or lying down painful, but she manages the pain with prescribed medication.

More than 20 people from the cruise were diagnosed with coronavirus. The vast majority of those diagnosed on the ship have been crew members.

For Kolstoe, the trip was two years in the making and a chance for her to relax and get her mind off not only her own health struggles but also the recent death of her husband’s father and her own elderly mother’s battle with severe cancer.

As she bided her time on the quarantined boat, stuck in a tiny room, spotty Wi-Fi stymied her ability to contact the outside world. She reported that the cruise distributed medical

questionnaires to passengers asking them to rank any medical issue from 1 (the most urgent) to 5 (not needing regular medication for the next seven days). Kolstoe listed herself as a 2, meaning an individual with “urgent preexisting medical appointments scheduled within the next seven days.”

On Thursday evening, she was flown off the ship and arrived home on Friday.

Once home, however, her 14-day quarantine reset to day 1. Details on how her chemotherapy treatment and quarantine can coexist had yet to be worked out. In yet another twist to Kolstoe’s story, her oncologist at the Mayo Clinic recently returned from Barcelona and is now quarantined at home, unable to see patients.

While she awaits word on restarting her cancer treatments, however, Kolstoe told the Herald she is certainly more comfortable in her own home. One of the first things she and her husband did was order pizza from a local favorite. “We put right on the memo of the delivery ‘set on table outside door,’ and we attached the tip online,” she said. “That was a highlight of the night, having a Happy Joe’s pizza.”

To read the CNN article, click here.

To read the Grand Forks Herald article, click here.

Go learn more about cancer and the new coronavirus, click here.

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