Cancer Treatment and Green Day's "Wake Me Up When September Ends."

Metastatic colorectal cancer is on the rise among those under 50. Doctors must not dismiss young people who come to them with symptoms.

October 31, 2022 By Robin McGee

My prayer for the day is that doctors everywhere respect the fact that mCRC is on the rise among those under 50. Doctors must detect, not dismiss, young people who come to them with CRC symptoms. Alas, so many rigidly believe that CRC risk begins at 50, and hence brush off symptoms in the young. It is the single greatest barrier to early detection in this age group. I'm heading up a virtual panel on Early Onset mCRC at the Colorectal Cancer Resource and Action Network's (CCRAN) Symposium on this topic. Sharing my own story of such medical myopia, described in The Cancer Olympics, might wake someone up. I have been invited to speak to two health professional groups in October as well.

Currently, I am on chemotherapy — a rechallenge of FOLFOX. It is my last systemic therapy option outside of a clinical trial. So far, I am doing much better on it than I did in 2017, when it turned me into an extra on The Walking Dead. This time, I am doing an icing protocol. That means that throughout the infusion I wear socks, mittens, and leg wraps with ice inside them, and suck on ice cubes. The vasoconstriction that results from icing reduces the impact of the drug on those peripheral body parts. For me, this has meant no cold sensitivity, no mouth sores, and no taste changes. I can eat and enjoy food! It is purported to minimize neuropathy as well, but time will tell on that score.

A scan in October will tell us if the drug is working. Even if it is, I cannot stay on it beyond another cycle due to its neuropathy-inducing properties. Next step would be palliative radiation, and then some experimental protocol or clinical trial.

I continue to have healthcare misadventures. The radiation oncologist I was initially assigned to proposed a very aggressive radiation plan (40 treatments in 20 days). He insisted on targeting my pelvic repair surgery as well. My surgeon vehemently opposed this plan, warning me that it would destroy me, and urging me to get a second opinion. I spoke to an expert from Sunnybrook on the phone who said such a plan had "the potential to dissolve the bowel." Yikes!!! So I had to fire that radiation oncologist and find my way to another. The second radiation onc is far more sensible. She will focus her gentler treatment on the problematic lesion, avoiding radiation to my bladder repair surgery. What a relief! Unfortunately, all the runaround delayed my treatments yet again. I

was supposed to start in June. instead, I started chemo in mid-August. The takeaway message: get a second opinion if you have any doubts about a proposed treatment. Your “spidey sense” that things are amiss must be trusted. Scary, scary stuff.

Today’s song “Wake Me Up When September Ends” is from Green Day’s 2004 famous award-winning album American Idiot. It was written by frontman Billie Joe Armstrong about the death of his father from cancer when Billie was only 10. I choose it today for its timeliness (it is the end of September as I write this) but also because of its evocation of loss and of the yearning for reprieve from grief. In real life, we do not get to sleep during the hard part.

Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends

Like my father’s come to pass
Seven years has gone so fast
Wake me up when September ends

Here comes the rain again
Falling from the stars
Drenched in my pain again
Becoming who we are

As my memory rests
But never forgets what I lost
Wake me up when September ends

Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends

Ring out the bells again
Like we did when spring began
Wake me up when September ends

Here comes the rain again
Falling from the stars
Drenched in my pain again
Becoming who we are

As my memory rests
But never forgets what I lost
Wake me up when September ends

Summer has come and passed

The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends

Like my father’s come to pass
Twenty years has gone so fast

Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends

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