

# There Wasn't a Biopsy

Category: The Biopsy

written by Carol Nelson Shepherd | March 8, 2024

During dinner with an oncologist friend, she noticed a lump at the front of my neck. "Likely a thyroid cyst," she said, "nothing to worry about," and explained that an ultrasound would differentiate a cystic from a solid lesion.

When we got the ultrasound results, I was shocked to learn that the mass was solid. My friend explained that the lesion was presumptively cancer and needed to come out.

Apparently, in the late '80's, in the face of a solid thyroid lesion, the standard practice was to proceed directly to surgery without a confirmatory biopsy. I guess the thinking was: "if it's not cystic, what else, other than cancer, could it be?"

When I was finally able to obtain an appointment with a surgical oncologist, he confirmed that the plan would be to perform a thyroidectomy and he entered orders to schedule the surgery.

As an attorney who represents patients in medical negligence cases, you would think I'd ask for additional tests (a CT scan maybe?) or a second surgical opinion, but I did not.

I was just terrified. Only in my late 30's, I had four little kids under ten. And a full time demanding job I needed to support them. All I wanted, indeed obsessed about, was to get every single cancer cell OUT OF MY BODY as soon as possible!

I called my mother to come from Arizona to help my husband with the kids, and got the surgery scheduled for the earliest possible date, a few weeks hence.

At the pre-ops labs, anesthesia and surgery consults the day prior to the surgery, I mentioned I could be imagining things, but I'd swear the mass was a bit smaller. "If it were cancer, shouldn't it be getting bigger, or at least staying the same, not getting smaller?" I asked the surgeon. He agreed to temporarily postpone the surgery.

Which leads to a big what-if: what if it hadn't taken some time to get the surgery scheduled? I'd have surgically lost my thyroid and been on thyroid replacement medication for the rest of my life.

But, the mass ultimately disappeared and never came back.

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