

When the Doctor Lacks Compassion

Category: The Biopsy

written by Roz Levine | March 24, 2024

It was a lump in my groin, discovered in the shower, that brought me to the doctor's office. "Likely a hernia," he said. "Let's schedule surgery." He seemed calm and unworried, and I expected the best.

When the phone rang several days post-surgery, he said, "I'm sorry to tell you it's cancer: non-Hodgkins lymphoma." I dropped the phone on the floor and started to scream—not scream but howl. I was 37 and had two young girls. His words pierced me as if I were on a firing line. *Am I going to die?* stamped through my brain.

I had to see him a week or so later, to have my stitches removed. At that appointment I told him, "I wish you had been gentler with your words or called me in to give me the news. It was so shocking to hear it that way. It would be better if you had a kinder way to ease the delivery of such information; I hope you never treat another patient like that."

His response was one I've never forgotten, although 44 years have passed: "That's your problem." Those unkind, insensitive words rattled me to my core. When I felt a little better, I wrote a scathing letter to the medical group to report his behavior, which seemed so cruel. I can only hope some higher-up educated him on what he sorely lacked in both compassion and sensitivity.

Roz Levine

Los Angeles, California