

Mirror

Category: Afraid

written by Karen Arscott | August 17, 2017

As I drove home after seeing my CT scan, I thought about how I could avoid telling anyone my diagnosis. It would be easy, I figured. I would wait until I had written confirmation of what I had seen. A few days passed, and I was able to maintain the deception—I loved acting, and this was an easy role for me, as protector of my family.

When the radiology report arrived, I felt like I was reading a report about one of my patients: “...suggestive of malignancy,” it said. I kept looking at the name and birthdate—yes, this was my report. Thus began my path down the rough road of lung cancer.

I was a 46-year-old, healthy physician, without any known risk factors; my situation didn't seem real. I kept thinking I would wake up and tell my physician husband about my absurd dream, and we would snicker at the ridiculousness of it all—lung cancer? Really?

Why was I afraid to tell those I loved? I feared looking into the eyes of my husband, mother, sister, children, and others and seeing them mirror my own hidden fears back at me. As long as I kept my diagnosis a secret, I could ignore the fear I was feeling inside.

Finally, I had to tell my loved ones the truth. I tried to deliver the news in a matter-of-fact way, so as to mitigate the emotions I felt and saw. My husband looked at me with fear in his widened eyes and said he was so sorry. He later confided that he began to mourn in that moment, due to the potentially poor prognosis of lung cancer. My sister and I were cooking together, and I said, “I have to tell you something that I don't want to say.” She looked at me and asked what I needed to say. So, very simply—too simply, maybe—I said, “I have lung cancer.” Her eyes widened and fear overcame her instantaneously. This scene repeated itself over and over with my mother, my children, friends, coworkers—each time the widened eyes of fear, mirroring back to me exactly how I was feeling inside.

It was frightening to have the truth out. I felt no relief at all.

And after my initial battle, the recurrence of my cancer brought forth the same fear—so visible in everyone's widened eyes...

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