

# Knowledge Is Power

Category: Coping

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | August 20, 2022

“Knowledge Is Power” proclaims a magnet on my refrigerator. The magnet is from the New York Public Library, but the sentiment is from Francis Bacon—and I embrace it as if it’s absolutely and invariably true. That is, when faced with a quandary in an unfamiliar area, I start digging for information with the intensity of a terrier whose prey is just out of reach. Especially when I’m faced with medical quandaries.

If something’s wrong—or I worry that something might be wrong—with me or a friend or a family member, I start clawing my way through every reasonable resource I can lay my hands on. I always hope to discover what the “something” might be, whether benign or dire; how it might be assessed and treated (and what the treatments’ risks and benefits are); and what the probable outcomes are.

I do this as an amateur. Unless you count a few CPR classes and a college course on nutrition (and, really, you shouldn’t), I have no formal medical training. But from my work with doctors and nurses and pharmacists, I know how to use PubMed and can find my way around the medical literature. I use the Cochrane Collaboration and resources like UpToDate and medical society disease management guidelines; I’ve spent countless hours online, tunneling through many interconnected rabbit holes.

You could laud my crazed digging as an effort to be an informed patient, caregiver, or advocate, but that’s far too charitable. In truth, it’s nothing more than a desperate coping strategy. My compulsive search for information is how I try to remain upright when the funhouse floor of uncertainty and fear sways underfoot, threatening my balance. Defaulting to the idea that knowledge is power, I build myself an armory and stock it with facts and findings. Does that help? Not exactly.

When a friend’s cancer is already stage 4 and metastatic before it is even suspected, let alone diagnosed, knowledge feels more like dread than power. In circumstances like that, knowledge is at best a shock absorber, something to help cushion the inevitable blow. But in less grim situations, even a little bit of background tempers the anxiety of uncertainty.

With all due respect to the New York Public Library and Francis Bacon, I must disagree that knowledge inevitably conveys power. As coping strategies go, though, knowledge, or at least the quest for it, serves me well.

*Jill Rovitzky Black*  
*Nyack, New York*