

How Teladoc Medical Experts helped Ashifa

Teladoc Medical Experts found the right diagnosis for Ashifa, saving her from the wrong treatment.

Ashifa had a small lump on her neck and was referred to a specialist for a biopsy. The results came back negative, but her general practitioner still recommended she get the lump removed as its structure was changing and her voice was being affected.

Ashifa was referred to a surgeon and underwent a successful operation. But about 10 days later, she received a call from the surgeon who told her the preliminary results from pathology revealed she had metastatic squamous head and neck cancer, a very aggressive type of cancer, though doctors couldn't determine the source of the cancer and she was immediately referred to Calgary's Tom Baker Cancer Centre.

At this point, Ashifa decided to contact Teladoc Medical Experts. Her husband became her full time health advocate as she continued to keep herself busy with work meetings as much as possible, and she authorized him to deal with Teladoc Medical Experts. He was in touch with Ashifa's member advocate a few times every week from that point on.

Meanwhile, Ashifa's oncology team at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre provided her with an aggressive treatment plan that called for 30 rounds of chemotherapy and concurrent radiation. She was left reeling, struggling to reconcile her cancer diagnosis with an absence of any symptoms, such as fatigue and pain.

"It made no sense to me, but they said in 25 per cent of cases, they can't find the source of the cancer and they have to go in and zap everything," she said. Unsettled, Ashifa and her husband contacted a few doctors they knew personally, sending them her test results. One specialist questioned whether Ashifa had cancer at all, prompting her to request a PET scan and MRI.

She also underwent a tonsillectomy, because the type of cancer she was diagnosed with has a tendency to "hide" in the tonsils, which must be removed in order to be biopsied. Ashifa described this procedure as "the worst pain" she had ever experienced.

Frustration set in. "At this point I had two surgeries and a total of 16 biopsies were done and they still couldn't find the source of the cancer," Ashifa said. However, the doctors at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre decided to stick with the original treatment plan and scheduled Ashifa for her first round of chemo.



"Teladoc Medical Experts was incredible—they were very supportive, responsive and timely."

In the meantime, Teladoc Medical Experts had Ashifa's biopsy samples retested by an independent pathologist at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto. The pathologist determined that Ashifa had an autoimmune related condition, not squamous cell carcinoma

A clean biopsy sample was then taken and sent to Teladoc Medical Experts specialists in Boston for testing. At this point, Teladoc Medical Experts' medical director had become involved in Ashifa's case and was also reviewing her biopsy samples.

Just before Ashifa was scheduled to go in for her first chemo treatment, her husband received a call from the Teladoc Medical Experts member advocate. Teladoc Medical Experts tested the new biopsy sample and the conclusion was definitive: Ashifa did not have cancer and the treatment plan needed to be canceled immediately. Ashifa said, "I received a call from my oncologist apologizing to me."

Teladoc Medical Experts specialists are now working on Ashifa's case with the oncology team in Calgary to determine what caused the lump on her neck. She will be undergoing further tests and everything will be reviewed by both the Teladoc Medical Experts team in the U.S., along with her oncology team at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre.

Not only did Ashifa credit Teladoc Medical Experts with helping save her life, she also lauded the entire process, adding that she frequently recommends the service to others. "Throughout the process, they would give us amazing updates," she said. "Teladoc Medical Experts and my husband saved my life," she said.



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