January 24, 2024

I am Jenifer Bowen, a Stage IV Metastatic Breast, Brain and Bone Cancer Survivor. Thriver. Warrior.

I write to you today in opposition of HF1930: End-of-life option established for terminally ill adults

Back in March 2019, I was quite unexpectedly diagnosed with stage IV metastatic breast cancer, which had quietly spread throughout my body, bones and even into my brain. The expansiveness of the cancer was devastating, having originated in my breast, traveling to my brain, down into both femurs and almost every conceivable place in between. Thankfully, there has never been any organ involvement.

This insidious cancer was only discovered while I was on a path of recovery from a car accident, when I was rear-ended and very injured, 6-weeks prior. Multiple scans soon revealed that this hostile, aggressive cancer originated in my left breast and then migrated to: 16 lymph nodes, my brain, neck, humeri bones, the vast entirety of my spine - where 2-large tumors were “dangerously encroaching upon both my spinal canal and cord,” down into both femurs, among other places. Thankfully, to date, there has never been any organ involvement.

In a word, my situation was dire.

From the outset, I was told, more than once, that the ensuing rigorous treatment regimen would be vast, unrelenting and overwhelmingly difficult, all while there were virtually no guarantees as I was confronting this “treatable, but incurable” disease.

Nearly 5-years later, although they have never expressed this directly, I am now aware of the reality that my qualified and extensive medical team, alongside those closest to me, never anticipated my survival would last beyond that first year of non-stop, intense and grueling treatments.

Immediately I was thrust into regular IV chemotherapies, which took place every 3-weeks until late-summer 2021. While simultaneously going through several dozen radiation treatments on too many body parts to even remember them all! These all occurred from April 2019 until late-summer 2021.

In working to save my life, everything turned completely upside down. Due to a myriad of treatments and multiple surgeries, significant side effects from the extensive cancer, the seemingly endless treatments and a slew of medications have stymied me and caused: extreme, uncontrolled, constant pain; often debilitating nausea; the destruction and loss of all of my teeth; life-long lymphedema in my right arm; a few unexplained 30-second seizures: tardev dyskinesia; the utter loss of a working right arm and hand, with no known reason for over 11-months, which began working again as abruptly and mysteriously as it had stopped working; all alongside many other tremendously negative impacts, with many that continue to wreak havoc throughout my body and will throughout the remainder of my life.

Fighting cancer non-stop is obviously exhausting. At any time, I could have been given a 6-month prognosis and been eligible for assisted suicide lethal drugs should that have been legal where I live.

Had I been urged by my medical team or personally desired to “choose” assisted suicide, I would never be where I am today - ALIVE and LIVING every day in a most unexpected, extraordinary reality in my considerably daunting, now years-long-expected-to-be-deadly-very-quickly battle to stay alive:

REMISSION! In early 2023, I remarkably achieved the extremely rare state of Remission! Currently I continue to maintain that level of stunning success! In fact, my radiation oncologist has told me that I am in the top 2% survival rate of those who encounter brain tumors such as the one they discovered in my original diagnosis and soon removed via a CyberKnife surgery.

Pondering my state of Remission, I still have many great fears, not only for my future self, should the cancer tear its ugly head some more, but most definitely for anyone facing similar diagnoses.

Consider: if the deadly “option” of assisted suicide was ever on the table, my medical team could (or can potentially in the future) just give up on me and push the lethal drug cocktail, instead of helping me continue to fight through to LIVE my life to the fullest, surrounded by those who love me, while pursuing meaningful activities and experiences - in this new life.

I also worry that if assisted suicide was legal, my medical treatments coverage would be dramatically scaled back, severely limited, even restricted or

eliminated because it is all so expensive compared to a far cheaper handful of killer drugs.

When enacted, assisted suicide laws invariably put vulnerable patients, like myself, in a worse state, a frame of mind where the “option” for ushering in death becomes too readily available to us or our medical teams. All while we are already locked in a nearly impossible struggle just to survive each day.

What if I had fallen for such an irreversible, seemingly tantalizing decision, when I was in the throes of my darkest, blackest, most agonizing pain-filled years, fighting for just one more day, week, year?

I would be DEAD. Untimely, irreversibly and unnecessarily dead.

How awful to consider how many people are or will fall for the deadly “promises” of assisted suicide while failing to realize some of their greatest days and even years, could lay ahead, just as they are for me!

Ultimately, these legislative measures do significantly undermine the confidence any one of us fighting a terminal disease needs to be able to live life to the fullest extent possible.

Any further hope for creative medical solutions is diminished, if not wholly extinguished, anytime assisted suicide becomes part of the conversation. In fact, many of these creative advances are directly linked to my unparalleled success thus far!

Consider: in my now nearly 5-year journey, many of the medical innovations and advances I have personally undergone, whether they be while hospitalized - in clinic - at home, include, but are not limited to:

-39 IV Chemotherapy rounds (3-different types each visit)

-89 Radiation treatments

-CyberKnife brain surgery

-Immunotherapies

-Access port for all necessary IV treatments, bloodwork and such

-Femur rod installation on the left leg

-Intrathecal medication pain pump installed, with morphine and bupivacaine

-Kyphoplasty spine surgery

-Removal of ALL my teeth, which had been destroyed by a bone-strengthening medicated shot, which had been administered once a month

-Multiple hormone blockers, I will continue to receive orally every day and via shots every 3-months

-Several blood transfusions

-Multiple iron diffusions

These are only a couple of the “creative solutions” that have helped extend the length and most definitely the quality of my life! They have been extremely beneficial for me and can certainly help many others as well!

Remission - I could never have achieved such a tremendous victory had assisted suicide by an option or even a foregone conclusion by insurance companies, medical providers, empowered by state politicians, to offer such an irrevocable, life-ending decision when encountering someone with such a dismal diagnosis.

Who can possibly know how many other people, in similar circumstances, could have such shocking, inspiring outcomes were it not perceived to be the compelling, expected - or even in time, the only choice - to end one’s life prematurely and under misguided assumptions, backed by the law, and administered by those in the medical field?

I humbly reiterate - please do not relegate vulnerable patients like me, often struggling daily just to survive, to a position where an option of death is readily available for us or our medical teams to choose. Doing so greatly undermines the confidence that is needed to live our lives to the fullest extent possible and again, diminishes the creativity that is required for the devising and developing of new, innovative, improved solutions which many have already radically aided me, leading me to this current place where there is presently, undeniably “no evidence of disease.”

Countless others can most certainly benefit too from medical professionals, who are able to repudiate any life-ending drugs and can instead remain fully empowered and equipped to offer the possibility of hope even when it all seems only hopeless - even as my own oncological story exemplifies.

My testimony is submitted in support of and on behalf of all vulnerable, terminally ill, disabled persons - from the smallest among us to the very infirm and aged, who are unable to speak on their own behalf.

In closing, I can attest to this basic fact of humanity - whether terminally ill, disabled or struggling in other debilitating ways - when we receive the love and maintain the support system that every single person deserves, all we truly desire is to be given and supported in every opportunity to fight for ourselves - to live to experience another day, month, year and all that such a victory can bring us.

Please, I humbly implore you, distinguished legislators, please - seek only to aid in the eliminations of so many of the sufferings, not in the elimination of any or all of the Sufferers.

May you always seek only to protect each person, ultimately recognizing and most importantly, protecting every human being’s intrinsic, incalculable value and dignity.

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