

# Let the Buyer Beware

Cancer treatment in the Internet Age

One of the effects of a cancer diagnosis is the hunger for information. That hunger is insatiable and overwhelming—a flood of questions, all with multiple answers. What is my diagnosis? What does it mean? What is the treatment? Does my doctor know the latest, most important data? What are my options? Where will I get the most successful treatment? Will I survive? Should I get treated? And on and on. Not only is the patient looking for answers, but family, friends, neighbors and even acquaintances feel the need to help ask and answer questions.

In the past, questions and answers were discussed with the doctor, and if there were further questions perhaps a second opinion would be sought. With the advent of the Internet, access to worldwide information is available. The Google search has become part of all of our lives, and the ease of access to information is far beyond anyone's dreams. There are now more than 10,000 scientific journals devoted to cancer worldwide, most of them publishing over 500 articles annually. That's more than 5 million articles published each year, directly related to cancer research and treatment, the majority, if not all, available on the Internet.

There are daily publications in the media related to cancer, from new treatments to alternative treatments and new ways to



diagnose. Unfortunately, that something is on the Internet does not mean it's a valid source, and the claims are often unsubstantiated. In January of 2019, the New York Post and the Jerusalem Post featured an article about Accelerated Evolution Biotechnologies Ltd, a new Israeli biotech firm that claimed they "will have a cure for cancer within the year." The truth was, their claims were false, but as a biotech startup, they were looking for venture capital money to continue their research.

I am constantly bombarded by articles and reports brought in by patients and their families about new treatments for their disease, and spend much of my day explaining the benefits of continuing with their proven therapies. People who are ill are looking for answers, and at a time when scientific and technological advances can happen quickly, patients are hopeful a new treatment could be lifesaving.

This is the Information Age and with the use of the Internet, access to information has become instantaneous. What has not become instantaneous, however, is validating new findings and having the ability to put new information into perspective. It is through experience, education, and discussion that true advances are found.

*Caveat Emptor*, let the buyer beware.



**Solomon I. Hamburg, MD-PhD**  
President