

June 11, 2021

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Home three days now, I am almost rid of the most obvious after-effects of the 6-day long infusion of rituximab, etoposide, prednisone, vincristine, cyclophosphamide, and doxorubicin. (Yes, too much information; I'll try to cut this back in future.)
- The day after my hospital discharge, I had a very productive and surprising (see below) conversation with my oncologist. Thank you for praying about this. Answers galore.
- On June 21, I will enter the hospital for another week of infusion of the cocktail above.
- I am immunosuppressed at present, and so I'm "cocooning" away from crowds, even away from grandkids. Barbara is holding up well, but please remember her as well as me in your prayers.

WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS?

If I unpacked everything I learned from that lengthy conversation with my oncologist, I'd write pages. And, if medical arcana is not your cup of tea, feel free to skip this section of this update. I'm abbreviating a lot of information here.

My first cancer back in 2018 was (a) chronic lymphocytic leukemia (hereafter CLL) with (b) a Richter transformation. That last part means that the CLL cells were generating cancerous B-cells, which are very aggressive. They were rapidly expanding my spleen and enlarging lymph nodes in my neck.

As I noted before, that 2018 bout of lymphoma was misdiagnosed as "plain jane B-cell lymphoma." The underlying CLL was missed.

Now here's an astounding thing: overall survival for CLL with Richter's is about 10 months. Many have died by five months. Even with chemo treatment. In my case, I had "baby chemo" (my current oncologist's term), **and I'm still alive 36 months later!** No one knows why.

Patients with Richter's are rare - about 500 in the entire country at any time. Though almost all have died by 10 months post-diagnosis, a tiny number keep on keepin' on. These too will eventually die if the disease isn't overcome. My oncologist has a plan - too complicated to summarize here - that leads to what appears to be a cure. Researchers have identified 10 patients nationwide who have followed this plan, and they are all healthy and alive today, with no evidence of lymphoma.

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT THE NEAR FUTURE?

Near term, the goal is to "mop up all the junk in your body," as my oncologist puts it. This will take at least six 6-day infusions of a chemo cocktail. The next cycle begins on June 21, the third on July 12. Labs and perhaps a scan will let us know how this mop-up is proceeding.

If we're ready at this point after six cycles, I will be discharged home, to take oral chemo at home via pill, aimed at knocking back the CLL. This will deploy a recently approved chemo agent which shows great success in pushing CLL into remission.

That's about as far as I can report for the near term, since I don't know yet how I am going to tolerate all this! Nor do I know how the cancer will respond (or not respond) to what we're throwing at it.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE LONG TERM?

Medical crises like this can discombobulate a bit. For Barbara and me, the longer-term future is a weird mixture of comforting familiarities we love - family, home, friends - now compounded with arresting blanks. It's not unlike a previous episode in our lives when our nine-year old daughter Francesca developed a brainstem tumor and died from it almost 25 years ago. I've wondered once in a while if we're running that lap all over again, with me as the performing athlete instead of my nine-year old daughter.

But, the blanks are just that - blank. We don't know how our Lord will paint them when He does so. We do know this, however, and we know it well. As certified septuagenarians whose relationship with our Lord stretches back into our childhoods, Barbara and I know the mercies of our Father in heaven, the grace of His Son Jesus Christ, and the comfort of His Holy Spirit. We have logged *decades* in these blessings.

And, so, with the aid and comfort of your prayers for us (and many helpful deeds of kindness and mercy), we purpose to be good stewards of the days allotted to us, whether they be many or few.

Thank you all for your abiding interest and prayers. I expect to write the next update soon after June 21, unless some event prompts me to write sooner.

Much love in Him,

Fr. Bill Mouser