As I sat listening to her, my mind was searching for the right words to say. She had come seeking my advice, yet I knew it was the last thing she wanted to hear.

She was a lovely 24-year-old woman. Two years earlier, she had graduated from college. And she had to grow up in a hurry.

The summer after her college graduation, she returned home to live with her divorced mother and 16-year-old brother. She brought her 48-year-old mother to her doctor to evaluate her fatigue and abdominal bloating. He evaluated her and quickly found the source of her problem. Their lives would never be the same. Her mother had a cancerous tumor growing from her left ovary.

They proceeded along the standard course of treatment. She had surgery to remove the cancer and followed with chemotherapy. She did well for a while, but within a year the cancer was back. Further treatment slowed the progression of the disease but was unable to cure her.

"I was looking for information on the Internet," she began, "and I found out about this cancer treatment center in Mexico. They use high doses of intravenous vitamins to boost the patient's immune system so that their own immune system can rid their bodies of cancer."

I was immediately suspicious. "Did they tell you how effective the treatment was?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, "I spoke to a doctor there, and he told me that about 95% of the patients are cured."

"Ninety-five percent were cured?" I questioned. "Then why isn't the treatment available in the United States?"

"I think he said they were cured," she answered. "The reason he said it wasn't available in the United States was that it is so cheap. He said drug companies make so much money treating cancer that they're able to keep high-dose vitamins from being FDA-approved."

"How expensive is the treatment?" I asked.

"Well, we'll have to fly to Mexico and stay there," she answered, "and every day go to the clinic to receive the treatment. It's just vitamins, nothing toxic, so my mom will feel okay. We'll be down there for two weeks, and with the flight and motel, I expect to spend somewhere between 10 and 15 thousand."

I was immediately suspicious. My stomach turned as I thought of the clinic, free of American laws, stealing the life savings of desperate families in exchange for false hope.

But as I looked her in the eyes, they filled with the fire of hope that I knew I could not extinguish. I explained to her some of my suspicions but wished her the best of luck.

Perhaps it was the vitamins, perhaps the warm Mexican climate, but her mother felt well during those two weeks. It turned out to be a wonderful trip. The treatment left time for long walks on the beach, quiet dinners, and long talks in their motel room. It was a time of joy and hope, free from the pessimism of her American doctors.

It was a time the young woman would always treasure and never forget. The memories would fill her heart and sustain her love, especially three months later, when her mother passed away.

(Adapted with permission from The Courier-Post, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, March 22, 2000.)

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