

Proponent Testimony – HB 8, Biomarker Testing

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee, I am Vince Marchetta from Akron. I am a life-long Ohioan.

In August 2017, my wife, Betsy, was diagnosed with cervical cancer, resulting from HPV. Her diagnosis was troubling, since she had the regular checkup with her Gynecologist just 5 months before with no signs of cancer. Betsy's rapid, aggressive progression of cancer required immediate treatment. Her phenomenal Oncologist was both compassionate and direct.

He informed us the standard treatment for more aggressive cervical cancers were a radical hysterectomy, followed shortly with cisplatin chemotherapy and radiation to her midsection. This approach had shown success in other cases. But at that time, this was the only approach typically prescribed. Then her Oncologist warned, if this treatment did not fully eradicate her cancer and it returned, there is no known cure for metastatic cervical cancer.

After 5 months of the standard treatment and another 2 months to recover and bounce back from treatment, her PET scan showed no visible traces of cancer. We now had to hold our breath, only having hope as the next form of healing.

In December 2018, vision in Betsy's right eye became dramatically impaired. Thinking it was a detached retina, we quickly visited an Ophthalmologist. The look on their face quickly told us this was no run of the mill detached retina. A tumor had formed on the back of her eye.

At the Cleveland Clinic, a biopsy revealed the cells in the tumor to be cancerous and not any of the typical cells associated with cancer of the eye.

Immediately admitted upon diagnosis, a radiation plaque was placed on the back of her eye to reduce the tumor. This was followed by a return to our Oncologist in Akron to determine the next course of action. But that had already been predetermined. More chemo (Avastin this time), trying Keytruda, an immunotherapy which had shown promise in clinical trials for metastatic cervical cancer. Continued spot treatment of tumors growing all over her body in an effort to give some sort of relief. And enrollment in a clinical trial for metastatic cervical cancer at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, MD...ironically the next town over from where she grew up in Potomac, MD

On August 12th, 2019, Betsy was admitted to the cancer floor at Akron Summa hospital, under palliative care. August 26th, 10 days after her 52nd birthday and 5 days after our 26th wedding anniversary, her body succumbed to cancer.

Why do I tell you this story? What if a deeper dive could have been accessible during her initial treatment? What if there was a way to better understand the cancer cells that had developed and why it was so aggressive? What if there were better solutions so Betsy could be here today to see both her children go to and graduate college? Be here to be my co-author of the next chapter of our life together.

Biomarker testing was not offered to her during the initial consult. The only tools available to our Oncologist was the standard treatment. There are 7 different chemotherapy treatments used for cervical cancer. What if there was a way to analyze HER specific cancer cells to determine if another initial chemotherapy or immunotherapy would have been more effective preventing the return of her cancer.

HB 8 will improve timely access to appropriate biomarker testing that can help achieve better outcomes, improve equality of life and reduce costs by connecting patients to the most effective treatment for their cancer.

Because of the impact that cancer had on my family, I am now an advocate and volunteer with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. Through my involvement with this organization, I have been able to meet many other Ohioans who have also been touched by cancer. Several of them wish that they could be here today to share their stories with you. Fortunately, you have received their written testimony. Their testimonials will give you real-world examples of how biomarker testing is helping Ohioans who are battling cancer. For example, Alique Topalian, a two-time survivor of Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML) said, "we learned that because of my biomarkers, a bone marrow transplant was not necessary." A bone marrow transplant is expensive and can be a risky procedure. Alique was able to avoid a bone marrow transplant and receive targeted therapy instead. She credits biomarker testing and the targeted therapy for saving her life.

You also received testimony from BethAnn Ennis, who shared "my biomarker test results revealed that I had the ALK positive gene mutation. Having this knowledge about myself was a blessing because there are five targeted therapies that exist to treat my type of cancer. Within 8-12 weeks after starting on one of these targeted therapies, I had no evidence of disease. Biomarker testing and targeted therapy gave me the gift of time."

And you also received testimony from Tom Pamer, a friend of mine and a prostate cancer survivor, who said "The results of my biomarker testing armed us with the information necessary to make decisions about treatment options that would give me the best chance of survival while maintaining my quality of life. I chose the best treatment option for my cancer and I no longer live in fear because of biomarker testing."

HB 8 can help Ohioans who are battling cancer. Please pass this legislation to give those individuals a fighting chance. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.

Vince Marchetta
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