

Testimony to the Senate Special Committee on Aging Field Hearing
“Pancreatic Cancer: Fighting the World’s Toughest Cancer in Alabama and
Nationally”

November 15, 2019

Lynette F. Nall

I am Lynette F. Nall.

Letisha was my first-born child, born February 5, 1972. She was a healthy child, growing up only to see a doctor only for annual physical exams each year. As she grew into adulthood, she was still healthy, eating healthy and exercising on a regular basis. She was a devout Christian, married with three (3) children, Kirsten 23, Dexter 21 and Selice 9 years of age. In February, “Tish”, as we called her, started having trouble getting comfortable when laying down. She said no matter how she would lie down, she couldn’t get comfortable and had trouble sleeping. Tish had light pain in her lower back. She went to see her primary care physician, but he couldn’t find anything wrong. She went on with the light suffering for about three (3) months.

In May of 2017, my husband Ronald, Letisha, Kirsten, Selice and myself took Kirsten to Iowa for a summer job and to attend the University of Iowa in August. Tish was still uncomfortable but tolerated the pain. We stayed in Iowa three (3) days. Upon our return back, Tish’s pain got a little worse. She got extremely nauseated and we had to stop on the side of the road. The nausea was the worst I had ever seen. We proceeded on the return trip home but stopped at the next exit at CVS and picked up about 3 nausea medications. We made the trip home without another nausea episode.

On June 23, 2017, Tish dropped Selice off at my home as she did every Friday. She didn’t look well but said that something she smelled at church made her sick. She said she would go home and rest, but the next call we received was from the St. Vincent’s Emergency Room. She drove herself to the hospital. I told my husband go to the hospital and that I would come in the morning to relieve him.

Ronald called later in the night to let me know she would be admitted to the hospital and would be on the oncology floor. THAT was something I did not expect to hear.

A biopsy was performed on June 26, 2017. The diagnosis on June 27 was Pancreatic Cancer, Metastatic Adenocarcinoma, Stage IV, Grade III. All of us were devastated! Dr. Ira Gore was the oncologist assigned to Tish's case. However, she was suffering from mental abuse from her husband, causing her much stress. She moved in with my family until her death in January, 2019.

On July 12, 2017, Dr. Gore started her on a Gemzar and Abraxane cocktail, three weeks on and one off. This treatment regimen lasted through November. Tish had the month off for December, blood counts were low and needed a break from treatment. Her tumor marker (CA-19-9) went from over 80,000 to around 1,000. It was better but far from normal. Tish appeared to be improving, and was sweet, strong spirited and very positive. Her faith was strong!

In January 2018, tumor markers went up again. Tish was also having severe back pain, nausea and constipation. She was also highly fatigued. Meds were used to resolve those issues. Dr. Gore decided to try immunotherapy, Keytruda. The pain worsened with the Keytruda. Pain meds were increased. Keytruda stopped after two treatments. Tish started feeling pain under her rib cage that Dr. Gore contributed to the cancer in the liver.

In March 2018, Dr. Gore changed the treatment to Fluorouracil (5-FU) regimen. This regimen continued through September 2018. By this time, Tish's tumor marker had gone up to over 184,000. She was also extremely tired and weak. Her blood counts were low.

In October 2018, Dr. Gore changed the treatment regimen to (Xeloda) Capecitabine 3000 mg daily, 2 weeks on, 1 week off. He also referred Tish to Dr. Walid Shaib, Emory Winship Cancer Institute in Atlanta. Dr. Shaib qualified Tish for a trial but wanted to wait and see if the Capecitabine would work. He did state that the Keytruda would have probably worked had she stayed on it longer. Dr. Shaib advised that the Keytruda causes the cancer to swell before it gets better, hence the increase in her pain. Visits to Atlanta were monthly.

In December 2018, Tish was very short of breath. Dr Shaib requested to take her to Emory ER. Tish had fluid on her lungs that had to be drawn off by a pulmonary doctor via a Thoracentesis. This fluid drainage had to be done twice more in January. She also started retaining fluid in her abdomen. She had to have a paracentesis to drain the fluid from her abdomen. Tish was also in intensive care for several days for blood clots on her lungs. She was released in the care of Hospice.

On January 30, 2019, after a few days at home, Tish succumbed to the disease in bed early that morning. Needless to say, there should be early detection for this disease. Tish's first visit to the doctor should have resulted in some test that could have saved her life. With all the trials that have been done, and still going on, there should be some specific treatment that has been proven to work well for this cancer. The trial and error methods were frustrating for Tish, and for me, as her mother, to see her suffer.