

## **Bev's recent odyssey with cancer**

*Tim Barnett*

In the fall of 2003 Bev began having problems with her stomach gurgling, diarrhea and not being able to eat. As she went periodically to see Dr Carroll for Hercepton he checked her tumor markers. Between October and January her markers doubled three times, with the last count at about 190. Dr Carroll didn't want to put Bev through more chemo so began treating her with hormone replacement drugs, plus Iressa. Iressa has been approved by the FDA for the treatment of lung cancer but oncologists have discovered that patients who have taken Iressa have better results with the chemo drugs they receive later.

Because of the problems she was having with her stomach, Dr Carroll ordered various tests, including CT scan, x-ray and a colonoscopy. The colonoscopy could not be completed entirely because there was something causing a blockage in the upper colon. So the possibility of a balloon procedure to stretch the area which the radiologist thought might be adhesions from previous surgery on her colon was discussed, as well as surgery to remove a small piece of her colon.

Bev went into the hospital on February 10<sup>th</sup> for what was predicted would be a 2 hour operation. After several hours Dr Teslow came out and talked to Tim, telling him that more extensive surgery had had to be done and that it would be some time yet until he was finished. The operation turned out to be eight hours long. They found cancer had covered many of her organs, she had to have a complete hysterectomy, 18 inches of colon were removed, as was part of the urethra, a colostomy installed, as well as a pic line through which IVs could be given. There were numerous micro tumors around her kidneys and in her stomach, liver and pancreas. The surgeon told Tim that it was very bad, that on average people in her condition survive about three months.

Bev spent a month in the hospital. Although she was released on the 17<sup>th</sup>, she had to go back in on the 18<sup>th</sup> because she had vomited four times during the night. On the 19<sup>th</sup> Dr Teslow ordered that she be started on Hyperal. After two more weeks she wasn't much better so we brought her home. Sharon had gone to Fairbanks to help for the two weeks following surgery and ended up staying a month.

Upon the advice of Bev's nurses, Chuck and Chris and Margaret and John all arrived March 16<sup>th</sup>, the evening of the day Sharon left. Chuck and Chris stayed for one week and Margaret and John for three weeks. Robert and Jonathan had spring break during that time, so Chuck and Chris did several fun things with them including taking them skiing. Eileen and Holly, friends from Pine Cove days, visited for several days, as well. Bev spent much of her time sleeping except for weekly visits to the oncologist. Kelly arrived from Arizona a few days before Margaret and John left. She stayed a week, overlapping one evening with Elaine and Sharon.

On the Tuesday before Easter Tim and Sharon took Bev into the oncologist's office because she was passing large blood clots in her urine. She was at the doctor's for about six hours receiving fluids, two units of blood and IV antibiotics. At the end of that day the nurse practitioner asked to speak with Tim. She said that the cancer was causing the high blood sugar levels and nausea which they couldn't seem to control. She told Tim that many patients with advanced terminal cancer did not go on Hyperal, the liquid nutrition she has been on for about

six weeks. She said that if Bev were taken off the Hyperal she would probably die fairly quickly because of the lack of nutrition and liquids. Bev has not been able to eat much since the operation and much of what she eats she loses through vomiting. The nurse said the vomiting was probably caused by the cancer and a tumor pressing against her abdomen.

The day before Easter, Bev again had a large number of blood clots so they took her to the emergency room. The ER doctor told us that she should be admitted to the hospital so they could determine which antibiotic would take care of the infection she had. So she was there until the following Thursday. All that time they were unable to regulate the spiking blood sugar levels, nausea and confusion. She was unable to keep food down though she tried. The Monday after Bev entered the hospital the oncologist repeated to both Bev and Tim what the nurse had told him a week earlier. They prayed about what to do and decided to continue with the Hyperal and to do the best we can with the blood sugar levels.

After she went home, still having lots of nausea and vomiting, one of Sharon's friends asked how often Bev's sugar levels were being checked and if she was receiving insulin. Tim picked up a glucometer and they discovered that Bev's sugar would spike as high as above 500 in a day. Sharon's friend also suggested that cutting down the amount of Hyperal Bev was being given each day might help with the high sugar level. And so they asked for the Hyperal dosage to be cut in half and Tim asked for insulin and instructions as to how much to give. Dr Carroll had been reluctant to cut back on the Hyperal, but by doing so the high sugar levels and confusion were soon a thing of the past and Bev began to eat small portions and keep them down, thus not losing any weight.

On April 17<sup>th</sup> Tim wrote "Bev's faith has remained strong. She continues to be an example to all of us of one's faith and love for God. We know the cancer will most likely take her life soon, but she has battled the disease for 13 years. While the chemo she is currently taking will not cure her it could possibly give her some extended time. A friend who lost his daughter to cancer told us that God is good even when life is difficult. We know that to be true. We trust God whether he chooses to heal her body here or in heaven.

"Times when Bev has felt discouraged we have felt God's love through many prayers, phone calls, cards and flowers. People at the church we have been attending for only six months have brought food, cleaned the house, visited and prayed for us. My staff at UAF have also brought food and visited. We have had friends from Aberdeen, New Orleans and CA write and call. Bev has been used by God in amazing ways and the love you all have shown to her has been such an encouragement. Thank you.

"Bev and I spoke today about what is ahead. It will not be easy for the next several weeks or until God calls her home. That may be in a few days or a few weeks. The boys and I feel God's grace and peace. We love Bev very much. We feel the goal is to remain obedient and faithful whatever God chooses to do with her life."

On April 20<sup>th</sup> Bev received a call from her oncologist's office with the news that her tumor markers had dropped by 50%! Since then she has slowly been improving each day, has more energy, sleeps less, eats more (a little at a time), and says she is getting bored and restless which are surely signs she is getting better physically.