



HEALTHY SOLUTIONS

by Lori Shea
MEDICAL TOURISM
FACILITATOR

My own medical adventure in Guatemala

It can happen to anyone, at any time and without warning

The subject matter was fascinating. Dr. Zetina was presenting detailed clinical reviews of complex cancer cases recently brought before the newly formed “Tumor Board” of top-notch oncology specialists, in alliance with Hospital El Pilar in Guatemala City. I need to know all about these important developments in order to accurately inform my clients and to disclose all the compelling facts in my next cancer article. I was studying the charts and listening to the presentation in Spanish, deciphering the medical terminology, translating it to English, condensing to digestible facts and writing my notes. Then, my world

became hot, and spun around, and went black. Just like that, in seconds.

With the help of Dr. Linares, I recovered from the seizure a few minutes later, confused, weak and aching like I had just aged 30 years. Beyond the initial incredulity, I was absolutely indignant that my own body could have betrayed me so completely, with no warning and no mercy. Clearly, I needed some top-of-the-line doctors and specialized high-tech diagnostics right away.

Ever practical, my next thought was, “and how on earth am I going to pay for all this?” Thankfully, I am in Guatemala and not some other country ... to the north, with no universal health care and an insanely expensive, convoluted medical system. I know that my Guatemalan doctors will have the skills and patience to diagnose my problem and guide my choices,

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(L) Dr. Zetina, Oncology
(R) Dr. Leal, Cardiology

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within days, and for a very honorable fee.

Well, I figure, I must have eaten something severely funky to have caused my head to detach from my body like the Exorcist child, so I made an appointment with Dr. Garcia de la Riva, my favorite gastroenterologist, the next day. We enjoyed a lovely chat, but he recognized it right away as a neurological problem, and I still had a lot of questions to be answered.

Up until this day, the only apparent indicators of my “advancing maturity” were reading glasses and a few gray hairs.

Next stop is at Tecniscan for cerebral magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), electroencephalograph (EEG) and a battery of lab tests. For my clients, I depend on Tecniscan every day for everything from pre-op exams to positron emission tomography (PET) scans for early cancer detection. I know it offers the finest quality diagnostic instrumentation, equal to some of the best hospitals in the world. This time, it had to be perfect, with results delivered to my doctor the same day.

In the elegant 12th floor high-rise office of my neurologist, Dr. Salguero patiently interpreted each frame of the MRI for me, with the clinical precision that comes from a lifetime of extensive experience. I was certain that his paternal tenderness and compassionate countenance were just softening me

for the final blow: that monstrous, ghastly, grapefruit-sized tumor that had invaded my skull. But no, he assures me, “Everything is clear, well-balanced and perfectly normal. I can’t find anything wrong with you.” Well, that’s good news, I suppose.

All the best physicians know that family history plays a big role in diagnosing the medical issues that are affecting their patients today. So, now comes the dreaded phone call to my mother, to ask about some crazy old aunt who suffered a brain meltdown, or the poor cousin who “went away” and we don’t talk about him anymore. “No, honey, you kids and all the family were always in perfect health. I can’t imagine what” For the major part of her 86 years, it has been my mother’s mission in life to impart to her children the reasons why things happen, with intuitive clarity, maternal wisdom and normally, a razor-sharp sense of humor. It was painful to hear her now, searching our history, grasping for clues. Then she rallied, triumphant, and gave it her best shot. “You know, dear, they are all alcoholics on your father’s side of the family.” I know, Mother, I remember the Christmas parties, but I think this is something different.

Oh no, dear doctor, with all due respect, I’m certain that you must be mistaken. I couldn’t possibly have heart problems. I’m waaaaaaay too young for that. Up until this day, the only apparent indicators of my “advancing maturity” were reading glasses

and a few gray hairs. Agggh, now this. Since the recent renovation and installation of an entirely new cardiology wing, there is no better choice for cardiology than Herrera Llerandi Hospital. So, I had all the tests: 24-hour Holter monitor, ultrasound echocardiogram and stress test, only for Dr. Leal to tell me that my heart is the right size, in the right place, and doing exactly what it is supposed to do. Stress? Well, I work 60-80 hours per week. Do you think that might be a problem?

Within 10 days of my medical issue, I consulted with three world-class physicians, had five state-of-the-art diagnostic exams, 11 lab tests and then all the follow-up visits. Total medical expenses: GTQ7,500, or US \$965. I'm certain that in some "other country" it might cost up to 10 times more and take a month or two.

Final analysis: A seizure like that will probably never happen again. And, I need a vacation. Maybe I should go to Florida and visit my mother. 🍷