

The Case of Betty Ballenger—Interdisciplinary Case Management Experience (ICME)

Ms. Betty Ballenger is a 54-year-old divorced woman who was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer (ER/PR-; her2/neg-) two years ago. At the time of diagnosis, she underwent a mastectomy, a lymph node dissection (seven nodes were positive), and chemotherapy for eight months. She was thought to be in remission until she went to her regular doctor several weeks ago complaining of progressive fatigue and back pain. She had put off seeking getting medical attention for the symptoms because she feared a recurrence. She had tried hot packs, cold packs, meditation, music and ibuprofen, but nothing helped and her pain was 7 out of 10. Her doctor prescribed her acetaminophen/hydrocodone (Lortab) and referred her back to the oncologist for a complete work-up. The PET scan revealed two spots on her spine and liver metastasis. She is now admitted to the hospital for pain management. Her oncologist has asked the palliative care team to evaluate her and help her set goals and plan for her future medical treatment.

Betty retired two years ago after teaching for 30 years in the Jefferson County system. She lives with her adolescent only child, Charlie, who has Down's syndrome. Her ex-husband who resides in Chicago provides financial support for Charlie but only sees him occasionally.

In the admission database, Betty identified herself as "Catholic." However, when she was visited by a lay Minister of the Eucharist the next day, she explained that she has not been "going to church" since her late teenage years and politely declined the sacrament. She keeps a book with Eastern religious reflections on her bedside table.