

December, 2001

PATIENT POWERline from the desk of Marie Savard, M.D.

RE: From Anthrax to Instincts

Dear Friends,

This has been a month of conflicting and confusing information about health care, reminding us that modern medicine is still more an art than a science.

### Trusting Your Instincts Can Save Your Life

We were reminded that our health care system is far from perfect when a headline in the November 27th Wall Street Journal reads "Anthrax Victims' Fate Varied by What Hospital, Which Doctor They Saw". The article described how two postal workers sought emergency treatment for their flu-like symptoms - one was treated for anthrax by an astute emergency room physician and survived whereas the other was sent home without specific treatment and died hours later.

I listened to an interview with the survivor, Leroy Richmond, and his daughter on The Today Show sometime after his successful treatment. It turns out that it was not really the astuteness of the doctor in the emergency room. The persistence of Leroy Richmond led to the early and successful treatment. Mr. Richmond kept telling his doctor that he knew that something was seriously wrong and persisted in his complaints until they were taken seriously. In fact, the doctor caring for Mr. Richmond when asked about her role stated, "Was it the grace of God? Luck? I wish I could tell you. I just listened to my patient." Mr. Richmond said to her, "I know my body, and something's just not right."

The famous Canadian physician, Sir William Osler, often reminded his students, "Listen to the patient. He is telling you his diagnosis". Some things will never change in medicine. Believe it. I think that is an important lesson for doctors and patients alike.

In my book, *How To Save Your Own Life*, the first and critical step: "Trust Your Own Instincts, You are the Best Expert on You" describes in story after story how important it is to trust your own health radar for yourself or your loved one when they are sick. Too often patients cower before their doctors, thinking the doctor surely knows best. Remember, doctors are human and we can all make mistakes. And to be honest, who better than you could possibly know the details of how you feel day by day, and how that may be different than the way you usually feel? In the book I give you practical suggestions as to how to work with your doctor and avoid the all too common problem of denial, [http://www.dr.savard.com/system\\_book.htm](http://www.dr.savard.com/system_book.htm). You can read the full excerpt of the Chapter at my website, [http://www.dr.savard.com/system\\_book\\_excerpt1.htm](http://www.dr.savard.com/system_book_excerpt1.htm).

The next time that you or a loved one is sick or something just doesn't seem right, speak up and see that you get the care that you need. That means doing your homework, keeping a journal of important observations and symptoms, bringing all your medical information to the doctor or emergency room (hopefully by now you all know the importance of collecting and keeping your medical records) and bring your health buddy with you.

### Don't Forget Your Health Buddy

Speaking of a health buddy, Leroy Richmond's daughter also knew how important it was to be there with her dad in the hospital 24 hours a day. She became the eyes and ears for her father, seeking consultations with specialists, asking questions, checking his medications and medical treatment. With nurses in shorter supply than ever and patients receiving more complicated treatment by a variety of specialists, it can be a matter of life or death to have

someone by your side while in the hospital. Your health buddy can do a lot to avoid the medical mistakes that all too frequently occur in the hospital setting.

Most people can't realistically spend that much time with a loved one in the hospital, but as I have recently experienced with my good friend's illness, people are eager to form teams and help out. All you need to do is ask for help.

I can't think of a better holiday gift for a family member or friend this year than to offer to be a health buddy for routine and emergency doctor's visits.

Best wishes for a safe and healthy holiday,

Marie Savard, M.D.

To learn more about how to get involved more fully in your own health care please visit my web site at <http://www.DrSavard.com>. Please feel free to share this message with your friends and family. I would also welcome your stories and questions, <http://www.info@DrSavard.com>.

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