

HODGKINS DISEASE

Michelle Sunderman
Music Enterprises
Lutheran High School North, Mt. Clemens, MI

[Assignment: First of all, pick a subject to write about that you know well and about which you think the general public is generally uninformed or misinformed. It should be a subject that has some complexity about it, which can be better explained and understood by using the rhetorical strategies of division and classification. Remember that division and classification are tools writers use to accomplish specific purposes. Your purpose should be clear throughout, to you and to your audience.]

The term "cancer" is frightening to most people. A diagnosis of cancer is not usually taken lightly. Many people believe cancer is a terminal illness acquired only by old people. However, my story will prove those people wrong.

During the first month of my freshman year of college, I found a lump in my shoulder which I believed to be a pinched nerve. After losing all feeling in my arm, I went to the doctor, who decided to run a CAT scan. At the time I did not understand why a CAT scan was necessary, but I left it in the hands of the doctor. The results of my CAT scan showed that I had three enlarged lymph nodes in my shoulder, and a mass in the cavity within my chest, an area known as the mediastinum. I first thought that it was impossible for me to have cancer. I was only eighteen, and I believed cancer was a disease old people got after years of smoking. My next thought was that I was going to die. The thought scared me, until I learned the truth.

The truth is that not all cancers are defined as terminal illnesses. Many forms of cancer are very curable. Luckily for me, Hodgkin's Disease happens to be one of them. I wish others could understand this also and possibly change the deathly definition that the word "cancer" seems to hold. I feel that this is an important mission because support from others is most beneficial to the patient in the endeavors during treatment and the struggle to keep a high morale.

Hodgkin's Disease is a cancer that affects the lymphatic system. The lymph system protects the body from illnesses, and helps build up the immune system by producing white blood cells. It consists of the lymph nodes, the spleen, the liver, and bones. Currently more than 75% of all newly diagnosed Hodgkin's patients are curable with radiation therapy and/or chemotherapy. However, before a patient can be treated, he/she first must be tested to determine which stage the disease has reached.

Before they are diagnosed, most patients show some sign of Hodgkin's, usually a painless swelling in the neck indicating a swollen lymph node. Those patients initially undergo a biopsy, a procedure which allows the doctors to determine if the tissues are cancerous. At this time the tissue is classified as malignant or benign. In Hodgkin's Disease, the pathologist will examine a tissue that contains Reed-Sternberg cells, abnormal cells that are usually found in the lymph nodes. Also at this

time, the patient's condition is classified according to the progress of the disease.

Hodgkin's Disease is divided in two stages, A and B. Stage determination is helpful to determine treatment. Doctors look for symptoms such as unexplained loss of more than ten percent of body weight in a period of six months, unexplained fevers with a temperature above 38 degrees Celsius, or drenching night sweats. The patient is considered to be in an A stage if no symptoms are present. If a patient is experiencing symptoms, usually he/she is classified into B stage. The disease has usually progressed further if the patient is in a B classification.

Hodgkin's is further subdivided into four substages. Many tests and surgeries are required for treatment during this staging process.

Stage One Hodgkin's Disease means the disease is involved with a single lymph node region. Usually in Stage One, cancer has been detected only in the neck area or in the chest cavity. Treatment for a stage 1A and 1B diagnosis is radiation therapy. Up to ninety percent of patients with Stage One Hodgkin's are cured.

Stage Two Hodgkin's means the disease has spread to two or more regions above the diaphragm, such as the neck and chest. Radiation therapy is used with patients with 2A stage. Chemotherapy is used for those who are classified as having 2B stage. Seventy-five to ninety percent of those patients are cured.

Stage Three Hodgkin's mean the disease has spread below the diaphragm, and may involve the spleen, and/or the liver. Chemotherapy is always used as treatment, and sixty-five to seventy percent of patients at this stage are cured.

Stage Four Hodgkin's involves all regions including the bones. Treatment is usually chemotherapy with radiation. Experiments with bone marrow transplants are also proving to be beneficial for patients in this stage. The cure rate in stage four is forty to sixty-five percent.

The cause of Hodgkin's Disease is unknown. Studies show that Hodgkin's occurs most often in females in their early twenties. Researchers have also made a possible link between mononucleosis and Hodgkin's. Most patients who have had Hodgkin's Disease have also had mononucleosis within two years of diagnosis. Although this is not completely proven, it is the best explanation as to why Hodgkin's occurs. The cells that are present in the body at the time of mononucleosis are the same cells that are present in Hodgkin's. Most people's immune systems can destroy the cancer cells on their own at the time of mononucleosis; however, a small percentage of the people are not strong enough, and therefore the cells begin to grow.

Hodgkin's is not a common form of cancer. It accounts for less than one percent of all cases of cancer. It is one of the rarest cancers, and it is one of the most curable forms of cancer. This offers much hope to patients with Hodgkin's Disease, including myself. The most important

precaution anyone can take to avoid developing Hodgkin's is to have a physical once annually, because early detection is the key to being cured.

My story hopefully ends happily. At the present time I am considered to be in remission, meaning there is no trace of cancer in my body. If my condition remains the same for the next five years, I will be considered cured. Since most people in stage 2A are cured, I have a very good chance. As I have shown, the word "cancer" does not always mean death. People who undergo the proper treatment can still have a promising future.