



Episode Show Notes

Episode Title: Communicating With Your Doctor: Knowing When It's Time to Switch

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Episode Description

Changing doctors can feel overwhelming, but it's often one of the most important steps in getting the lung cancer care you deserve. In this episode of **Living With Lung Cancer: Ask Me Anything**, host Annabelle Gurwitch sits down with lung cancer advocate Colette Smith for an honest conversation about self-advocacy, doctor-patient communication, and recognizing when it's time to make a change.

Colette shares how her diagnosis transformed her into a fierce advocate for her own care—and why she believes every patient deserves healthcare that meets their needs. She reveals her unconventional approach of maintaining relationships with multiple oncologists, explains how she stays informed about research specific to her mutation, and offers practical advice for preparing for appointments.

Annabelle reflects on her own experience switching oncologists and shares a powerful communication framework she learned from Dr. Jorge Gomez: "This is my goal. How close can you get me to that?" Together, they explore why changing doctors isn't about disloyalty—it's about finding care built on trust, respect, and collaboration.

Whether you're newly diagnosed, navigating a treatment transition, or simply want to feel more confident in the exam room, this episode offers practical strategies for becoming your own best advocate.

Guests

Annabelle Gurwitch – Host, Author, and Patient Advocate



New York Times bestselling author and LCFA Speakers Bureau member living with stage 4 EGFR+ lung cancer. Annabelle brings compassion, wit, and unflinching honesty to conversations about the real challenges of living with lung cancer. Diagnosed five years ago, she uses her platform to advocate for patients and raise awareness about treatment advances.

Connect: <https://www.annabellegurwitch.com/> | @annabellegurwitch

LCFA Profile: <https://lcfamerica.org/speaker-profile/annabelle-gurwitch/>

Colette Smith – Lung Cancer Survivor and Patient Advocate

Colette Smith is a dynamic lung cancer survivor, patient advocate, and community health champion who transformed her 2015 Stage 1A adenocarcinoma diagnosis into a powerful platform for change. As a never-smoker diagnosed through persistent self-advocacy, Colette's mission is to emphasize the importance of patient empowerment and early detection. Living with EGFR exon 20 lung cancer, she actively follows research specific to her mutation and maintains relationships with multiple oncologists to stay informed about emerging treatments and clinical trials.

Key Topics

- Why patients change doctors—and why it's not about disloyalty
- Finding your voice in the exam room after a lung cancer diagnosis
- The belief that drives self-advocacy: "I deserve the best healthcare possible"
- Building a care team with multiple oncologists for different expertise
- Following the science of your tumor's specific mutation or biomarker
- A powerful communication framework: "This is my goal. How close can you get me to that?"
- How to prepare for appointments without losing focus
- Recording conversations with your doctor (with permission)
- Why some patients prefer attending appointments alone
- Recognizing when a doctor isn't the right fit
- Setting realistic expectations while advocating for your needs
- Finding trustworthy lung cancer patient communities

Key Takeaways



You Deserve the Best Healthcare Possible – This isn't arrogance—it's the foundation of effective self-advocacy. Believing you deserve quality care empowers you to speak up when something doesn't feel right.

No Question Is Silly – If something concerns you, ask about it. A doctor who dismisses your questions may not be the right fit for your care.

State Your Goals Clearly – Use this framework: "This is my goal. How close can you get me to that?" Whether your priority is minimizing side effects, pursuing aggressive treatment, or maintaining independence, clear communication helps align your care with your values.

Consider Building a Care Team – Maintaining relationships with multiple oncologists—especially those who specialize in your specific mutation—can help you stay informed about emerging treatments and prepare for transitions.

Follow the Science of Your Mutation – If you have a specific driver mutation like EGFR exon 20, connecting with oncologists and patient communities focused on that subtype keeps you informed about new clinical trials and approved therapies.

Changing Doctors Isn't Betrayal – It's about finding care that aligns with your communication style and needs. You deserve clear explanations, respect, and collaborative decision-making.

Prepare for Appointments Your Way – Whether you bring written questions, record conversations (with permission), or attend alone to stay focused, find what works for you.

Seek Realistic Expectations – Part of a good doctor-patient partnership is understanding what current science can and cannot offer. Honest conversations about limitations are just as important as discussions about possibilities.

Connect With Patient Communities – Groups like EGFR Resisters, ALK Positive, and ROS1ders offer peer support and practical advice from others living with the same diagnosis.

Powerful Quotes

"I deserve the best healthcare possible." – Colette Smith

"This is my goal. How close can you get me to that?" – Communication framework shared by Annabelle Gurwitch

"No question is silly. A doctor who dismisses your questions may not be the right fit." – Colette Smith



"Lung cancer gave me a courage I didn't always have." — Colette Smith

"Changing doctors is not about hurting feelings—it's about care that aligns with your needs." — Annabelle Gurwitch

"I frame seeking additional opinions not as disloyalty but as staying informed." — Colette Smith

"Lung cancer is not a one-time medical event. It requires ongoing decisions, evolving treatment plans, and a doctor-patient relationship built on trust and communication." — Annabelle Gurwitch

Episode Timestamps

- 0:00 – Introduction
 - 0:43 – Why Annabelle changed doctors
 - 1:45 – Asking about "Plan B" and long-term treatment
 - 4:00 – How Colette found her voice in the exam room
 - 5:15 – Evaluating whether a doctor is right for you
 - 7:24 – Building a care team and staying connected with multiple oncologists
 - 8:20 – Following the science of your specific mutation
 - 9:22 – How to express your treatment goals
 - 12:05 – Preparing for appointments and asking clear questions
 - 13:00 – Why patients sometimes go alone to appointments
 - 15:22 – Navigating difficult news and emotional moments
 - 16:57 – Advocating for reasonable expectations
 - 17:30 – Where to find support and trustworthy lung cancer communities
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Resources Mentioned

LCFA Resources

- LCFA Website: <https://lcfamerica.org>
- Living With Lung Cancer AMA Podcast: <https://lcfamerica.org/living-with-lung-cancer/ask-me-anything/>
- LCFA Speakers Bureau: <https://lcfamerica.org/speakers-bureau/>
- LCFA Second Opinion Resources: <https://lcfamerica.org/resources/second-opinion/>



- Biomarker Testing Information: <https://lcfamerica.org/lung-cancer-info/diagnosing-lung-cancer/biomarker-testing/>
- Treatment Options Overview: <https://lcfamerica.org/lung-cancer-info/treatment/>

Patient Advocacy & Support Communities

- EGFR Resisters – Patient community for EGFR+ lung cancer: <https://egfrcancer.org>
- ALK Positive – Patient community for ALK+ lung cancer: <https://www.alkpositive.org>
- ROS1ders – Patient community for ROS1+ lung cancer: <https://theros1ders.org>

Find Specialized Care

- Elevate Lung Cancer Care: <https://elevatelungcancercare.com>
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Action Steps

For Patients & Caregivers:

- **Reflect on your care relationship:** Consider whether your current doctor meets your communication needs and respects your questions
- **Practice stating your goals:** "This is my goal. How close can you get me to that?"
- **Prepare for appointments:** Write down specific questions, scan-related concerns, and clarifications about treatment decisions
- **Consider recording appointments:** With your doctor's permission, recordings can help you revisit important information later
- **Research your mutation:** If you have a specific driver mutation, learn about treatments and clinical trials specific to your subtype
- **Build your care team:** Consider maintaining relationships with oncologists who specialize in your mutation, even if they're not your primary provider
- **Join a patient community:** Connect with EGFR Resisters, ALK Positive, ROS1ders, or other groups based on your diagnosis
- **Trust your instincts:** If something doesn't feel right about your care, you have the right to seek a change
- **Decide what works for you:** Whether you bring a support person or attend appointments alone, choose what helps you stay focused and present

For Healthcare Professionals:

- Welcome questions from patients—no question should be dismissed as silly



- Recognize that patients who ask questions and seek information are engaged in their care, not being difficult
 - Proactively discuss "Plan B" options so patients feel prepared for potential treatment changes
 - Support patients who seek second opinions—it's good medicine, not disloyalty
 - Connect patients with oncogene-specific patient communities for peer support
 - Take time to understand patients' goals and priorities beyond their diagnosis
 - Communicate clearly about what current science can and cannot offer
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About the Podcast

Living With Lung Cancer: Ask Me Anything is LCFA's survivor-led podcast that strips away clinical jargon to reveal what living with lung cancer really looks like. Hosted by New York Times bestselling author Annabelle Gurwitch and endurance runner James Hiter, this podcast hands the microphone to those who know this disease best—lung cancer survivors and the experts who treat them.

No topic is off-limits. No question is too uncomfortable. No experience is too raw to share. Each episode features candid conversations about navigating healthcare, advocating for yourself, and finding hope through scientific advancement.

Raw conversations. Real survivors. No filters.

About LCFA

Lung Cancer Foundation of America improves lung cancer survivorship through funding transformative science, raising public awareness, and providing access to information, hope, and contemporary treatment options.

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