

As Long As There Is Hope, There Is Life

Opening narration: Setting the Scene

Frame 1: Sarah, 29, was 8 months pregnant with her first child when she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer seven months ago.

Frame 2: Since then, Sarah has undergone two unsuccessful chemotherapy treatments.

Frame 3: Today, Sarah and her family are meeting with her doctor to discuss results from the third treatment.

1 Establishing image: Hospital/office. *Perhaps include an image that shows the complexity or tension of what's going on? A tightly pulled web of strings about to break?*

Susan: Well, Sarah, as you know we're all here today to discuss the results of your CT scan. Unfortunately, the results show that the tumor deposits in your left lung, chest and lymph nodes have grown substantially.

2 Individual testimonials: Background stories I

Sarah: When I was first diagnosed with lung cancer a few months back it was terrifying, a complete and utter shock. I had never smoked. I exercised. I ate well.

Zach: At that point, we didn't want to focus on survival statistics, we wanted to focus on aggressively managing this diagnosis. We had a baby on the way, who would we be to give up in the face of death?

Sarah: After that initial shock, my first thought was that Zach should remarry. I even spelled out my wishes for Vivian's upbringing, and made it clear I wanted to die peacefully at home, not in the hospital. Then I picked myself up somehow, you know everyone is telling you to fight, to stay positive. I gave birth to Vivian pushing with just one lung. It was so difficult but she came out beautiful and healthy.

Zach: That first time after Vivian's birth we tried to get our lives back to normal. We wanted so badly to be part of those 15% that make it, why not us?

3 Office:

Susan: You see, in this kind of tumor work, there are no guarantees. We are always fighting that uncertainty. The drugs had a strong possibility of inciting a positive response, but in this case, well, in this case they didn't respond.

4 Individual testimonials: Background story II

Elizabeth: Sarah was always the one of my two daughters to keep things together. I rarely saw her break down, even as a young child. When we found out about Sarah's diagnosis, Timothy and I both decided to do everything in our power to help Sarah battle this terrible disease.

Rose: I broke down in tears when I found out, Sarah had to hold me. I wish I could hold her through this, but it's hard, being the little sister and all. She's always been the one to care for me.

5 Office:

Zach: So, what does that mean? Do we give it more time? Does that mean a different treatment?

Susan: No we don't give it more time. If her cells haven't responded yet, there isn't a chance of them changing course in the future.

6 Individual testimonials:

Sarah: Well at this point, I've lost 30 pounds and I'm feeling more tired every day. I know that this is not going in the right direction. The chemotherapy made me too weak to even hold Vivian. I had double-vision, I couldn't feel my hands, but I didn't tell anyone because maybe they would make me stop the treatment. Zach needs me to be strong. He can't handle my weakness. I don't think my family can either.

Rose: At that point, all I could think of was the wisdom of alternative healing... See, we are not sick because we have cancer... we have cancer because we are sick. And all sickness can be transformed, from within.

7 Office:

Timothy: You mean there isn't a chance of the cells responding to *this* drug. But, with all due respect Dr. Reding, I've been doing a lot of research on Sarah's cancer and I found a number of experimental drugs we haven't tried yet.

Susan: Well, yes. There are . . . yes. I'm just worried about the aggressive growth we've seen in this last CT scan. I'm worried about, well about the *speed* at which we may experience further growth. And I think it might be time to talk about worst case scenarios just a little bit, in case things don't go as we hope. (*hesitates, lifts her hands up, then puts them back down...continues*) And then best case scenario, too.

Timothy: Well, best case scenario we continue with trying the next treatment, just like we've been doing up to now.

Zach: I agree. Best case scenario we push on with the treatments you think are best, Dr. Reding.

8 Individual testimonials:

Elizabeth: (sighs) I don't know. I just don't know. In that moment, I wondered if we were doing the right thing, after all. As a mother, you see things. It's taking a toll on her. I know Timothy thinks we should push forward at any cost. But I don't know what costs we're even dealing with anymore.

9 Office:

Susan (softly): I just want to be honest with you all about that so you know where things stand. *(pauses, then in a sturdier voice)* So, given that, as you pointed out Timothy, there *are* still options. It is, of course, up to you, Sarah, and your family, to choose how you would like to proceed.

Sarah (forced optimism): Okay, so what are those options? It sounds like we can still fight this thing?

Susan: We can try a drug called pemetrexed. Studies have found it can produce markedly longer survival in some patients. Now to be transparent, only a small percentage of patients gain much time, and even that time is limited. So, that is a factor worth considering before you make a decision.

10 Individual testimonials

Susan: So you have a young woman with a brand new baby. Of course everyone is fighting for every chance that she's got. You don't want to be the downer, and you don't want them to lose confidence in your ability to do your job. With stage four lung cancer, we know it's not curable. But suppose she's the one that somehow gets miraculously cured. Maybe she's that one.

11 Office

Timothy: You said that the amount of time we gain is limited. How limited? How much time does she have left if she tries this thing?

Elizabeth: Timothy, God, you make it sound so bleak. It's not how much time Sarah has left, it's how much time she gains. We have to remember to stay positive.

Susan: I can't tell you an exact time. We could be talking about three to four months. It could be longer, or even shorter. Really, you've got to find what matters most to you and follow that.

12 Individual testimonials

Sarah: The most difficult thing is not knowing, am I dying, am I not? It's a mental rollercoaster, I'm just overwhelmed with everything.

Elizabeth: I have to admit that seeing all of this makes me wonder if we're strong enough, as a family, if I'm strong enough to handle this. I know Sarah will most likely die before I do. I just don't know if I can see her suffer the way she does. I keep telling myself that Sarah has the mind, the body and the spirit to fight this disease but I honestly don't know.

Zach: I mean, yeah, somehow a reality without Sarah has crossed my mind. I never signed up to be a single dad, a widower. This all just happened to me. Would I ever find someone else to raise Vivian with me? How would I handle the pity from everyone around me? I usually brush these thoughts off. Sarah needs me to stay positive, it's the only way.

13 Office

Zach: What matters most is that we extend the time we have... Right? The more time alive we have, the more developments that can occur. Research breakthroughs happen all the time. That's all I'm saying. It's possible, isn't it?

Sarah: Yes, that's right, miracles can happen in a few months. Maybe I could see Vivian turn 1.

14 Individual testimonials

Susan: Well, I must admit I'm seriously questioning whether continued treatments is the best option. I do hesitate to tell them this though. I don't think that's a discussion the family is ready to have. And I don't want to let them down.

Timothy: I know Sarah is going through a lot of pain right now. I'm not oblivious to the fact that she might not make it through this one. But I won't stop pushing for a cure, I want her to know I would fight for her until the very end.

Sarah: I mean, people count on me to keep my spirits up, who I am to fail the people I love the most? I'm just overwhelmed with everything. I honestly don't know for how much longer I can handle this.

15 Office

Rose: I think as long as we don't allow negative thoughts to dictate things, we can get through this.

Elizabeth: While there is hope, there is life. Mmm. While there is hope, there is life.

Susan: As I said, I can't predict what will happen. But . . . we can hope. We can try, and we can hope.

16 Hospital: Heart monitor declining/Testimonials: *Emergency room sounds while people are talking?*

Zach: When I woke up last night, she was sitting upright beside me, struggling for air. I didn't know what to do or what was happening. We weren't prepared to handle this kind of reaction at home. After we got to the hospital, there was this awful groaning. Inhaling or exhaling, I don't remember, but it was horrible, horrible, horrible.

Elizabeth: They wanted to put a catheter in her, do this other stuff to her. I said no, you aren't going to do anything to her. I didn't care if she wet her bed. I went over to the head nurse and told her to stop. I wish I had said it sooner. No more suffering for her. No more.

Zach: I didn't want to admit it. I didn't want to say goodbye. But in the end, I couldn't ask her to fight anymore. It wasn't fair.

Screen goes black--we hear Sarah's gasping.

Zach: "It's ok to let go. I will see you soon."

The heart monitor beeps rapidly then stops and levels out at an even tone indicating Sarah's death.