

## Beware of Cancer Fakes

**Libby Porter**, aged 36, from Alberta in Canada, posts regularly about her Stage 4 breast cancer on Twitter and TikTok. Here she answers questions about her experiences doubting the veracity of a fundraising patient, and later finds out what it's like to be on the receiving end of accusations that she has faked her cancer diagnosis.

*You offered financial support to a patient who was then accused of fraud. What happened?*

After I supported another woman's fundraiser for her metastatic breast cancer (MBC) on Facebook, I was contacted by a few women from a support group. They were worried that this woman was a fraud, potentially raising money for the wrong reasons. She was swiftly removed from the support group, and many were warned not to donate to this potentially fraudulent fundraiser. Over time I gained clarity she wasn't faking and recently she seemed to have found effective treatment. Her posts became less frequent, and I imagined she was busy enjoying life. The truth was the opposite, her cancer had spread. Soon after she died, before I had the opportunity to apologize for doubting her claims.

*Then the boot was on the other foot. Tell us about your experiences.*

I never considered that my cancer diagnosis would also be doubted, however, I recently found myself the center of heavy accusations when I was made aware that several other metastatic patients didn't believe I had breast cancer. Once these allegations were made, they gained momentum and seemingly nothing could change peoples' minds. I felt blindsided that rather than believing me, people blindly believed others.

*So, you have a clearer perspective on cancer fakes now?*

These experiences have made me think deeply about the nature of cancer frauds. Is it necessary to expose them, if so, what is the correct way?

*But cancer frauds do exist?*

Often, the support community is where we share our deepest struggles and fears. Naturally, people feel outraged and hurt that someone might be in the group for nefarious reasons, or to scam us. Cancer fraud is far more frequent than one might assume, and many of those who have spent a year or two in the cancer community can recall an encounter with a fraud. Sadly, many can also identify someone accused of fraud who later died from cancer. The latter stresses why it's important to think carefully.

*So, what should we do?*

It can be tempting when suspicious of another patient to want to oust them, but we must think clearly before publicly exposing someone. If suspicions prove correct, the person could be removed from the cancer community, and fraudulent fundraisers reported. Regardless of the satisfaction found in revealing a potential fraud, the consequences of wrongly accusing someone must be considered. False accusation strips patients of valuable support resources, and potentially furthers the patient's feelings of isolation.

*You found out this first hand*

Yes, anyone who has experienced cancer would agree, cancer is difficult enough, without further marginalizing another patient.

*So, do your research before you act?*

Someone falsely accused of fraud has more to lose than anyone would gain calling out a real fraud. Therefore, if we encounter a potential fraud, we should proceed with caution and respect. There is never reason to publicly announce that someone may be scammer.

*As you found out, false accusations can ruin someone's life.*

If we do absolutely need to approach an individual, we should do so on a one-on-one basis. Another patient's diagnosis should never become a public conversation. We always have a choice about who to communicate with and to which fundraisers we donate. Sometimes the best policy is to simply distance ourselves from an individual we are suspicious of, until clarity is gained.

Libby was the subject of false allegations that her breast cancer posts, articles and videos were an act of fraud. Of course, they were not, and while she must continue in treatment for the rest of her life, she can rest assured that her directness and honesty is appreciated by all her friends on social media.