

# Mom and teen home, but debate rages on...

Posted At : May 29, 2009 2:11 PM | Posted By : Susan McClure

Related Categories: Diagnosis, Treatment, Caregiving

I'm sure many of you have been following the plight of Daniel Hauser, the 13-year-old Minnesota boy who scrambled to the Mexico border with his mom in order to avoid undergoing court ordered chemotherapy. For those of you who haven't, let me catch you up. In January Daniel was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma-- what experts are calling "a highly curable disease". He had one round of chemotherapy before his parents told doctors that he wasn't going to have any further treatment. The first treatment resulted in a reduction of cancer, but because Daniel hasn't had another treatment since, his cancer has returned to pre-treatment levels. The doctors were very concerned. So concerned in fact, they turned the matter over to the courts. They said Daniel has a good chance of achieving a complete remission if he resumes treatment. They felt that Daniel's life was in jeopardy and that his parents weren't acting in his best interest. Knowing that the courts were likely to force Daniel into chemotherapy, he and his mom fled town. Well, they're home now, less than a week since their life on the run began. Daniel's parents have told the judge that they will abide by whatever ruling is made--even if that means undergoing more chemotherapy.

But why did the Hausers decide against such a proven treatment plan in the first place? Like most issues related to cancer, it's complicated. The family is Roman Catholic, but they belong to a group called the Nemenhah Band, which promotes a "Do no harm" philosophy. They believe in natural healing methods advocated by some American Indians as an alternative to traditional treatment. In fact, Daniel and his mother believe that the treatment for his cancer is what will end up killing him-- not the cancer itself. They were seeking "less toxic" options to treat his cancer.

That decision resulted in a heated national debate surrounding the government's right to intervene in cases such as this. According to a recent MSNBC poll in which participants were asked if parents should be allowed to refuse cancer treatments for their sick children, public opinion was split. Of the 77,276 people who responded as of May 28th, 55% said "Yes, families should be allowed to make their own decisions in every aspect of medical care", and 45% said "No, refusing care that could save someone's life is a form of medical neglect". Many who answered "yes" said that while they did believe that the parents were putting the child at risk, this is America and we have a little document called The Bill of Rights that protect people in cases such as this. Those who answered "no" said that this was just another form of child abuse and that refusing to render medical aid to a sick child is unjustifiable.

I was thinking about my own cancer treatment and wondered how I would feel if someone told me that I had no right to refuse a particular therapy. Granted, I was 35 when I was diagnosed--not 13. What do you think? I'm looking forward to your

comments.