

Milford tot's hopes rest in Bahamas lab therapy

By JUDI DOHERTY
Staff Reporter

The daily routine of Amber Calistro, the 4-year-old Milford girl stricken with cancer, now revolves around myriad injections, blood tests and hope.

In the Bahamas to undergo an innovative and as yet unproven cancer therapy, Amber is handling the ministrations and the waiting with the unquestioning acceptance that only children seem to be able to muster, according to her mother, Patricia Callistro.

"She is adjusting to the pulls (blood samples) and needles amazingly well," Ms. Callistro said in a recent letter.

"She practices on her dolls and toys and even gave us one (filled with sterile water). We are letting her natural curiosity and imagination guide her coping mechanisms, and so far, she has a matter-of-fact attitude toward this whole scene," her mother wrote.

The scene described by Ms. Callistro is the new and controversial "immunotherapy" offered to cancer patients by the Immunology Researching Center in Freeport on Grand Bahama Island under the direction of Lawrence Burton.

The center uses various techniques blended to stimulate the body's natural immune system in fighting cancer cells.

The cancer that is threatening Amber's life began last fall with a lump behind her right ear. Although she was taken to several doctors and health experts, it was not until March, when Amber was taken to Yale-New Haven Hospital, that the lump was diagnosed as cancer.

Although the tumor, which began as muscle cancer, was removed, malignant cells already had spread to her brain and spine.

Choosing not to pursue the conventional treatment involving radiation and

chemotherapy, Ms. Calistro explored alternate theories in treating cancer and has put her hopes in the work being done by the center in the Bahamas.

When Amber and Ms. Callistro left for the Bahamas early in May, another tumor already had started to form near the incision that marked the site of the first cancerous lump.

After two weeks of therapy at the center, Ms. Callistro wrote, the second lump has "gone down about half."

In its literature, the center maintains that cancer patients it treats have responded with a cessation of tumor growth in some instances, no new tumor growth in other cases and in many instances, an actual reversal of cancerous growth.

The therapy to stimulate the body's natural immune system is based on 20 years of research and testing in laboratory animals. The established medical community, however, has yet to accept the program as a proven treatment for cancer in humans.

Ms. Callistro, an artist, is expecting to keep Amber in the immunotherapy program a minimum of two months. Many of their expenses in the Bahamas are being covered by a \$3,000 donation from a woman who had learned of Amber's disease and her mother's search for a cure.

"The environment is beautiful," Ms. Callistro wrote. "The air smells of pine trees, salt and flowers. The people are warm and friendly and the sun shines and shines."

Despite the sun and sea, however, Ms. Callistro said she misses Milford, her friends and her studio.

"Hopefully, things will improve well enough so we can come back soon... In the meantime I will keep in touch as I can."