What are my scan results – coping with uncertainty

Andrew R. Haas, MD, PhD
Director, Interventional Pulmonary and Thoracic Oncology
Scanxiety
Scanxiety - Two Scenarios

• You are told you have an abnormal CT scan
  – Do I have cancer?
  – Am I going to live?
  – When will we actually do something?

• You have cancer and have undergone treatment
  – Assessment of response
  – Surveillance for recurrence
You have an abnormal CT scan

• Recognize the majority of abnormalities are not cancer
  – Lung cancer screening – nodules are common
• Find a reliable team that can expedite the evaluation
• “Word of mouth” recommendations go a long way
• Communication is key
How do I cope?

- Rely on family, friends – social support network
- Do things you enjoy – exercise, yoga, music, movies, reading
- Maintain your normal schedule
- Admitting you are struggling emotionally, psychologically is not a sign of weakness
You have cancer and have undergone treatment

• We perform lots of imaging
• Indications
  – Surveillance after Surgery
  – Surveillance after Chemotherapy/Radiation
  – Monitoring response while on treatment
The Reality of Scanxiety

• Imaging is stressful
• Anxiety and anticipation leading up to scans
• Scanxiety is normal
• Scanxiety is almost universal
• Can cause a post-traumatic stress disorder type reaction
Symptoms of PTSD

• Hyperarousal
  – Easily startled – “on edge”
  – Feeling tense
  – Difficulty sleeping
  – Angry outbursts – “short fuse”

• Avoidance behavior - isolation
Further enhancing scanxiety

• Falsely positive results with scans can occur frequently
• PET scans falsely positive 10-20% of the time
  – Difficult to interpret in patients who have had prior radiation, immunotherapy
• Uncertainty is very difficult for us to provide exact guidance, comfort, and reassurance
Strategies to Deal with Scanxiety

• Choose a team you have faith in – Ask them questions
• Be mindful about what you read
• Stress reduction strategies
  • Meditation
  • Exercise
  • What ever makes you less stressed
  • Maintain your schedule
• Scheduling – pick a time that is good for you and minimizes time between scan and results
• Consider a support group or chat room
Day of Scan

• Bring calm family or friend
• Music
• IPAD
• Book
• Same day office visit
For Difficult to Control Symptoms

• Cognitive Behavior Therapy
• Medications
Final thoughts

Don’t worry about walking a mile in my shoes, just try a day thinking in my head.