

'A sad case': She chose herbals over surgery

June 9 2009, By MARILYNN MARCHIONE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- Leslee Flasch worked in a hospice. She had seen cancer treatments fail. Now doctors were saying she needed her colon removed to treat her rectal cancer. Barely 50 years old, she would have to wear a colostomy bag for the rest of her life.

She tried some chemotherapy and radiation, but the radical surgery was something she could not face. She turned instead to prayer, a special diet and supplements she researched on the Internet.

Paw paw, mushroom extracts, pills with names like "cell regulator" and "immune stimulator." Rows of bottles lined her medicine chest. She grew worse, but still refused surgery.

"The whole family wanted Leslee to go seek medical treatment," said a sister, Donna Flasch. "I'm a believer" in herbs, Donna said, but "you don't let something like that grow. You don't ignore it and think it will go away."

Another sister, Sharon Flasch, a nurse, tried to convince Leslee that conventional treatments had helped many people.

"She didn't see what I do - I see the successes," Sharon said. "I wouldn't have played with cancer. Even if I tried the herb thing, I would have had regular checkups" to watch for signs of spread, she said.

By the time Leslee went to Tampa's Moffitt [Cancer](#) Center, shortly before she died in 2007, she was in severe pain and no longer able to

have the surgery she had rejected earlier.

"A lot of it was fear of the unknown, fear of what she thought was going to be horrible. But she ended up having one of the most miserable ends of life that we see," said surgeon Sophie Dessureault.

"It was a sad case, because I see a lot of patients with this diagnosis, where patients get treated and go on and have a regular, normal life" after a colostomy, she said. "It's the job of the physician to explain not just 'this is what you need' but 'this will happen if you do it, and this will happen if you don't.'"

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