



## BEST DOCTORS MEMBER STORY ALLISON

**“It was so gratifying to hear from Best Doctors that this wasn’t all in my head and that there was a real medical condition causing all my symptoms.”**

- Allison

Allison had health problems off and on since her hysterectomy 17 years ago. The worst, however, was the vertigo. It started about six years ago, and was so bad it landed her in the emergency room with severe dizziness and high blood pressure from anxiety and panic. Tests showed nothing wrong, except an inner ear infection.

The vertigo continued, forcing Allison to leave her job and begin taking anti-anxiety medication. Now that the vertigo was affecting her personal and professional life, and since her doctor was unable to provide a clear reason as to why it was happening, Allison decided it was time to seek another opinion. She called Best Doctors, a service available through her spouse’s benefit plan at Merit Contractors Association that provides an expert medical review from world renowned, peer-nominated physicians.

“They were great,” she said. Best Doctors contacted all of the physicians she’d seen over the years and collected all of her records. When Allison received her report from the expert specialist she finally had a diagnosis - vestibular migraine. She researched the condition online and, finally, it all made sense. She had the classic symptoms of vestibular migraine: vertigo, balance problems, dizziness, unsteadiness and extreme sensitivity to motion, plus a history of migraines.

The Best Doctors expert specialist recommended several medications Allison could try, as well as alternatives such as physical therapy. She also saw a dentist, who fitted her with a night guard to prevent her from clenching her jaw and grinding her teeth, both of which can trigger a migraine. “The migraines are mainly gone,” she said. “If I stick to a regular diet and exercise I can keep them at bay. I feel good now.”

“It was so gratifying to hear from Best Doctors that this wasn’t all in my head and that there was a real medical condition causing all my symptoms.”

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**ABOUT  
BEST DOCTORS**  
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With a worldwide network of over 53,000 leading medical specialists, Best Doctors is an award-winning organization that has been helping members ensure they have the right diagnosis and the best treatment options, for over 20 years.

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# How Best Doctors Helped Ashifa

**Best Doctors found the right diagnosis for Ashifa, saving her from the wrong treatment.**

Ashifa had a small lump on her neck and was referred to a specialist for a biopsy. The results came back negative, but her general practitioner still recommended she get the lump removed as its structure was changing and her voice was being affected.

Ashifa was referred to a surgeon and underwent a successful operation. But about 10 days later, she received a call from the surgeon who told her the preliminary results from pathology revealed she had metastatic squamous head and neck cancer, a very aggressive type of cancer, though doctors couldn't determine the source of the cancer and she was immediately referred to Calgary's Tom Baker Cancer Centre.

At this point, Ashifa decided to contact Best Doctors. Her husband became her full time health advocate as she continued to keep herself busy with work meetings as much as possible, and she authorized him to deal with Best Doctors. He was in touch with Ashifa's member advocate a few times every week from that point on.

Meanwhile, Ashifa's oncology team at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre provided her with an aggressive treatment plan that called for 30 rounds of chemotherapy and concurrent radiation. She was left reeling, struggling to reconcile her cancer diagnosis with an absence of any symptoms, such as fatigue and pain.

"It made no sense to me, but they said in 25 per cent of cases, they can't find the source of the cancer and they have to go in and zap everything," she said. Unsettled, Ashifa and her husband contacted a few doctors they knew personally, sending them her test results. One specialist questioned whether Ashifa had cancer at all, prompting her to request a PET scan and MRI.

She also underwent a tonsillectomy, because the type of cancer she was diagnosed with has a tendency to "hide" in the tonsils, which must be removed in order to be biopsied. Ashifa described this procedure as "the worst pain" she had ever experienced.

Frustration set in. "At this point I had two surgeries and a total of 16 biopsies were done and they still couldn't find the source of the cancer," Ashifa said. However, the doctors at the Tom Baker



**Best Doctors was incredible—they were very supportive, responsive and timely."**

Cancer Centre decided to stick with the original treatment plan and scheduled Ashifa for her first round of chemo.

In the meantime, Best Doctors had Ashifa's biopsy samples retested by an independent pathologist at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto. The pathologist determined that Ashifa had an autoimmune related condition, not squamous cell carcinoma

A clean biopsy sample was then taken and sent to Best Doctors specialists in Boston for testing. At this point, Best Doctors' medical director had become involved in Ashifa's case and was also reviewing her biopsy samples.

Just before Ashifa was scheduled to go in for her first chemo treatment, her husband received a call from the Best Doctors member advocate. Best Doctors tested the new biopsy sample and the conclusion was definitive: Ashifa did not have cancer and the treatment plan needed to be canceled immediately. Ashifa said, "I received a call from my oncologist apologizing to me."

Best Doctors specialists are now working on Ashifa's case with the oncology team in Calgary to determine what caused the lump on her neck. She will be undergoing further tests and everything will be reviewed by both the Best Doctors team in the U.S., along with her oncology team at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre.

Not only did Ashifa credit Best Doctors with helping save her life, she also lauded the entire process, adding that she frequently recommends the service to others. "Throughout the process, they would give us amazing updates," she said. "Best Doctors and my husband saved my life," she said.

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## Member story: Meet Joel and Jayda

Joel's daughter Jayda was only 6 months old when she was diagnosed with epispadias, a rare congenital abnormality in which the urethra does not develop properly, causing urinary incontinence.

Jayda's first operation was at the age of 1, when she had a stent placed in her kidney. This procedure failed to improve Jayda's ability to hold her urine, and over the next few years she underwent a series of smaller procedures. Unfortunately, none successfully resolved her condition.

All this time, Joel and his wife were trying to avoid an invasive procedure meant to enlarge Jayda's bladder. Jayda's treating doctor, a paediatric urologist, had recommended this procedure after she was initially diagnosed.

Once Jayda was 6 years old and had endured several failed procedures, Joel and his wife were forced to make a decision. The first option was to proceed with the bladder enlargement operation they had been trying to avoid over the years. However, now that Jayda was older, her paediatric urologist felt this procedure would no longer be effective. Instead, the paediatric urologist recommended a completely different procedure that would result in Jayda having an external contraption that she would need to manually drain. This was the second option. Joel and his wife decided to go with the bladder enlargement operation (option one), hoping that it might work and Jayda could avoid having an external device for the rest of her life.

Joel wanted an expert opinion on whether they were making the right decision, so he reached out to Best Doctors. Just a few days before Jayda's surgery date for the bladder enlargement, Joel cancelled the operation after the Best Doctors report came back and the expert advised against it, echoing what Jayda's treating doctor had told them. The Best Doctors expert, an associate professor and paediatric urologist renowned in his field, agreed that at this point in Jayda's life, this particular procedure would no longer be effective. The Best Doctors expert provided details further explaining his reasoning as to why this wasn't the proper solution for resolving Jayda's condition.

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procedures wouldn't work."**

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"Best Doctors was very helpful —the reality sunk in that smaller procedures wouldn't work," said Joel.

He reviewed the report with Jayda's paediatric urologist, who was familiar with the Best Doctors expert.

"The nice thing about the report is that it gave us help with questions to ask and it cleared some things up," said Joel.

Joel and his wife ultimately decided to proceed with the other procedure that will result in Jayda having an external apparatus that she will need to drain. This operation will provide a permanent solution to Jayda's medical condition.

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Member story:  
Pamela



Despite undergoing knee replacement surgery for osteoarthritis, Pamela was plagued by persistent pain in her right knee that impacted her mobility and sleep.

Post-op physiotherapy only provided mild relief and other treatments were also ineffective in resolving the issue.

It was only after Pamela enlisted the help of Best Doctors that she found out the reason for her constant pain: Her knee replacement hadn't been done correctly.

Pamela reached out to Best Doctors, which she had access to through her extended health plan, after she wasn't getting any answers from the orthopaedic surgeon who performed the initial operation. He told her an X-ray showed everything was fine and advised Pamela to continue with her treatment plan. However, physiotherapy, laser treatment, and a cortisone injection only provided Pamela with temporary relief.

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Pamela's case was reviewed by a Best Doctors expert, an orthopaedic surgeon with a subspecialty in knee surgery, who provided some possible causes of Pamela's persistent pain and recommended further diagnostic testing, including bloodwork, a bone scan, and a possible CT scan. Pamela also found a new orthopaedic surgeon using Best Doctors FindBestDoc® service, which provided her with a list of the most highly rated local orthopaedic surgeons.

After Pamela went through further testing, the Best Doctors-recommended surgeon determined that her knee replacement had not been performed correctly. This explained the constant pain, as her knee was not functioning properly. Pamela ended up undergoing another knee replacement surgery, performed by the new surgeon.

Although she is still recovering from the second operation, Pamela said she feels better and her walking has improved.

Pamela said she had a very positive experience using Best Doctors services and felt as though she received more support from Best Doctors and the new surgeon than she had received from her first surgeon.

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# Best Doctors

## MEMBER STORY:

### SHERREE



Sherree spent nearly four years trying to find a family doctor after moving to a new city and not getting the results she was seeking from her local government agency. Her frustration only ended once she contacted Best Doctors.

“It was a wonderful experience right from the get-go,” Sherree said of working with Best Doctors. “I felt like I finally had an ally.”

Her ordeal started when Sherree and her husband moved to Fredericton from Saint John in September 2011. She immediately registered with the government agency that is responsible for placing residents with doctors in the city.

“We didn’t hear anything for months, so I gave them a call and was told that my name was on the list,” Sherree said. After still not hearing back several months later, she called again and was told that her name was one of 9,000 on a wait list of people looking for a family doctor in Fredericton.

In May 2013, Sherree started experiencing debilitating pain in her knees, hips and legs.

“It then became urgent for me to find a doctor,” she said. The pain eventually became so severe that Sherree could not drive for more than 15 minutes.

She continued to call the government agency, but to no avail. She didn’t have any indication of where she and her husband stood on the wait list, how much longer they would have to wait, or even how patients were prioritized.

“It was so frustrating because I was getting worse and worse, and I had no access to any specialists because I didn’t have a doctor to refer me,” Sherree said.

In the spring of 2015, she contacted Best Doctors, with which she had coverage through her husband’s employer, a member of the Merit Contractors Association. That’s when everything changed.

Within a week, Best Doctors responded with the name and number of a doctor in Fredericton who was taking patients. She immediately called the doctor’s office and was told by the receptionist that the protocol required her to first contact the same government agency that she had registered with four years ago. Sherree learned that doctors with openings can only accept new patients who are referred to them from the agency.

Without Best Doctors locating a doctor in the city who was accepting new patients, Sherree would have never known to escalate her case up the chain of command with the government by insisting that she knew of a specific opening.

“Best Doctors facilitated the problem being corrected,” Sherree said.

Sherree now has a family doctor in Fredericton and has already seen a specialist who diagnosed her condition. She needs to have a hip replacement, as damage in the area is the source of her pain. She’s now working with the specialist on managing her pain through medication and other treatments until she ultimately gets a hip replacement.

“I now have a course of action,” Sherree said. She added that she would recommend Best Doctors to anyone who needs help navigating the health care system or who needs guidance with any kind of health care issue. “Best Doctors knows what information to get and give back to you. They just make everything so much simpler,” she said.



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## Member story:

Tracy



Tracy became concerned when she noticed a new mole on her back. Her doctor performed a biopsy and one month later Tracy was diagnosed with melanoma.

She was referred to a dermatologist who confirmed a diagnosis of Clark level 2 skin cancer, meaning the cancer had spread into the upper layer of the skin. The dermatologist recommended that Tracy have an additional one-centimetre margin of skin surrounding the biopsy site excised, and a surgery date was booked.

Tracy knew she had access to Best Doctors through her insurance plan, so she reached out for an expert medical opinion. A Best Doctors nurse called her to gather her information and provided Tracy with constant email and phone updates.

"I would hear from her every week," Tracy said.

Best Doctors collected Tracy's medical records and sent her biopsy slides to one of the Best Doctors centres of excellence for pathology retesting. She received a call from a Best Doctors physician who explained the retest showed Tracy had an atypical mole, indicating a different diagnosis. Because of the disparity between the original

pathologic interpretation and the Best Doctors retest, Tracy's biopsy slides were sent to a Best Doctors expert for a third opinion. This expert, a dermatologist specialising in dermatopathology and skin cancer, concluded that the growth on Tracy's back was benign. The expert advised against further excision.

The day before she was scheduled to undergo surgery, Tracy received a call from the Best Doctors nurse.

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"If I hadn't called Best Doctors I would be spending my entire life thinking I have cancer."

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"She said it's not melanoma and the doctor did not deem surgery to be necessary," Tracy said.

Tremendously relieved, Tracy still decided to proceed with the surgery—she explained the original melanoma diagnosis had terrified her. "I was due for surgery the next morning and I couldn't stop the train in my mind," she said.

Tracy said she's grateful to Best Doctors for determining she had been misdiagnosed.

"If I hadn't called Best Doctors I would be spending my entire life thinking I have cancer, it could come back, and that my kids are at a significantly increased risk of developing melanoma," she said. "It's a huge mental relief."

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