

## STATEMENT OF MRS MARIA SHORTIS

22. Exhaustion

By the evening of Monday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, both Tim and I were feeling exhausted. Tim had stayed with Sam, so that he did not feel we were abandoning him. I stayed with Jacinta. Tim's mother came to help out with meals and other domestic duties for a day or two. There was no other practical support available to us from either of our families, since no one lived locally. During the evening, I was extremely worried as to whether Jacinta would survive the operation.

23. Waiting for Mr Dhasmana

On the morning of Tuesday November 18<sup>th</sup>, we were standing in the Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) of the BCH. We were ready to meet Mr Dhasmana, and to listen carefully to his explanation of the procedure that he would perform on Jacinta later that day. Both Tim and I had questions about the risks that the procedure carried, and we were preparing to face the possibility that Jacinta would not survive her operation.

24. Meeting Mr Dhasmana

At 11 a.m., we were shown into a small room by a nurse from ITU, who I think was called Jeanette, for our consultation with Mr Dhasmana. As we sat down, Mr Dhasmana said, "Had I got to you before the consultant cardiologist, I would have told you that your daughter is inoperable, and have asked you why you want to put her through such misery. I have cancelled the operation." It came out in a burst of frustration and anger, and I found the way Mr Dhasmana informed us of his decision was totally unprofessional. I heard Tim groan, and saw him slump back in his chair.

Signed M. B. Shortis

Dated 22.7.99

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25. My Reaction

My initial response was, "But you didn't get to us first." I was trying to collect my thoughts, and wondered what Dr Joffe had based his decision on. I had the impression that Mr Dhasmana was telling us the truth, but that his communication skills were appalling: he appeared to have blurted out his own decision, rather than presenting us with reasons. At no point had Dr Joffe stated that the surgeon did not think that Jacinta was inoperable. Now, I was faced with the possibility that my child's operation would not go ahead, and a surgeon who was evidently angry with his colleague. I felt as though I had been drawn into inter-departmental hospital politics, particularly between these two men.

26. I Question Mr Dhasmana

Following his outburst, I said, "Mr Dhasmana, do you not want to operate on Jacinta because she is going to die anyway?" I believed this question would give him the opportunity to answer in the affirmative. Had he believed it to be a waste of time, I could and would have accepted it. However, Mr Dhasmana's reply struck me as illogical and cowardly, and made me cross. He moved back in his chair and shouted, "I am not talking about death, I just like to see my patients through." The implication of this was that he liked to have a good success rate. However, when I asked him about this, he informed me that there was no problem with this operation, and that Jacinta would come through it easily; he quoted me a 95% success rate.

Signed Maria ShortisDated 22.7.99

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27. Mr Dhasmana's Recommendation

I felt that I was dealing with someone who could not give a straight answer, and said, "Mr Dhasmana, having cancelled her operation, what do you want to do with Jacinta?" He replied that he wished to take her off all her drugs, and monitor her progress. I interpreted this as meaning that he wanted to let her die, since Dr Joffe had already told us that Jacinta would die within 48 hours if she was taken off her medication. I therefore informed him of Dr Joffe's opinion. Mr Dhasmana stated that he had seen patients whose patent ductus arteriosus was still open and functioning at the age of 18. I remarked that I suspected these patients did not have five major heart defects. However, by this stage, I was so stressed by this conversation that I consented to Jacinta being taken off her drugs to see how she coped. I remember that Mr Dhasmana appeared to be very relieved, but also surprised at my reaction. I added that, as her mother, I wanted her to be put back on her drugs if she became cyanosed, and in danger of dying, since I was not yet ready to say goodbye to her.

28. The End of the Meeting

Mr Dhasmana seemed pleased that I had agreed with his plan, but stated, "As you have been promised the operation, I suppose I shall have to do it." He said this in a sulky manner, and it seemed such an unprofessional way to end our conversation that I left the meeting in some distress.

29. Jacinta Is Taken off her Drugs

Throughout November 18<sup>th</sup>, I came into the hospital to feed Jacinta every three hours. She did not seem any worse without her drugs, but Dr Joffe was nowhere to be seen. During the 19<sup>th</sup>, she appeared to be maintaining her colour, and her *ductus* was clearly not closing. I went in on the morning of Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November, and Jacinta still seemed to be fine. I told the nurses that I would not be in during the evening, as I was exhausted, and needed a break. They thought that this was a good idea.

Signed M B Shortis

Dated 22.7.99