

# Foundation aims to comfort those hit by cancer

By MIMI EUBANK  
Staff Writer

When Patti Stiewing's daughter Amber was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer 17 years ago, Ms. Stiewing and Amber fled the country, searching for alternatives to traditional medical treatments.

Now, with her new support foundation for anyone who has been touched by cancer, Ms. Stiewing hopes to erase the fear and uncertainty she had of the disease that eventually killed her 4-year-old girl.

More than for comfort, Ms. Stiewing hopes that Amber's Alliance Foundation will empower anyone who joins or logs onto its web site.

"The average person like you and me right now does not have a voice," Ms. Stiewing said. "It's the lack of direction, the lack of an outlet that is leading people to extreme frustration and bitterness."

For now, the foundation is a network for discussion and information-sharing. Its home-base is the Internet, where the foundation web page will display a different survey four times a year.

Browsers will be asked to answer 10 questions about alternative and traditional treatments, prevention, current waves in cancer research or how they believe government and the medical establishment are reacting to their concerns.

Responses will be published in a quarterly newsletter, so foundation members and browsers can see how others responded.

Ultimately, Ms. Stiewing wants the con-

cerns of the average person to be heard by those she believes have the greatest influence on the cancer phenomenon: pharmaceutical companies, environmentalists, politicians and the medical establishment.

"This is a global problem here, and the answer is a global answer," Ms. Stiewing said.

Ms. Stiewing's vision for the foundation is based largely on her own experiences with Amber. Fearful that radiation and chemotherapy were experimental — as she believes now — Ms. Stiewing searched for eight months for an alternative treatment.

She settled on an immunotherapist in Freeport, Bahamas. The doctor drew blood from the little girl as many as three times a day, analyzed what proteins were missing, and then injected Amber with those proteins as many as 12 times daily to strengthen her immune system.

Ms. Stiewing, who in 1996 authored "Embrace the Angel" about Amber's story, said she was later criticized for seeking out nontraditional treatments.

Today, nontraditional treatments are more widely accepted in the medical community, said Dr. Stanley Watkins, head of the oncology unit at Anne Arundel Medical Center.

However, traditional doctors call the measures complementary rather than alternative, to emphasize they should be used in conjunction with conventional American Medical Association treatments.

The medical staff at AAMC does educate

patients about wellness measures — nutrition, exercise or massage therapy.

While those methods do improve the quality of life, Dr. Watkins stressed the debate shouldn't be one of conventional versus nontraditional.

"The thing I'm most concerned about is that people are drawing a line in the sand, saying either go with AMA or alternative treatments. I'm saying there's room for both."

Deborah Russell, nurse coordinator at AAMC's Breast Center, said Amber's Alliance will fill a void for many cancer patients and survivors.

"If they need to talk to someone on a peer level, they may not have that sort of networking, so (the foundation) will provide it," Ms. Russell said.

Eventually, Ms. Stiewing hopes to bring together the average person with the traditional medical community to work out differences and come up with workable solutions.

"What I'm doing is begging and pleading with the public to stop fighting and start working together to fight this disease," she said.

The foundation web site may be reached at [www.amerbsalliance.com](http://www.amerbsalliance.com). The mailing address is P.O. Box 4937 Annapolis, MD 21403.

*Staff Writer Kristin Hussey contributed to this story.*



By J. Henson — The Capital

Patti Stiewing holds a photo of her daughter, Amber, who died of cancer 17 years ago. Ms. Stiewing has started a foundation called Amber's Alliance Foundation, a support and information network.