

Prostate Cancer Smarts

News-Views-Clues

Content by a Savvy (understanding, experienced) Survivor

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“Prostate cancer was the last thing on my mind . . . then it became the first.”

The question is often asked: Is prostate cancer testing right for me? There is no shortage of opinions in the medical community or in prostate cancer support groups on the value of testing. But, in case you haven't heard the pros and cons about getting screened for prostate cancer, here's an overview in a nut shell.

Those against regular screening say most prostate cancers grow very slowly; the side effects of any treatment would outweigh any benefit that would come from testing for cancer at a stage, or at an age, where it's unlikely to cause problems.

Those for regular screening say finding cancer early offers men more treatment options with fewer side effects. Ask almost any man how he learned he had prostate cancer and he will tell you he had the PSA test and DRE (digital rectal exam).

Screening for prostate cancer is a personal and complex thing. As a survivor, I became confused and frustrated as I read about prostate studies written by medical pros. Because of their complexity I almost gave up. But I didn't, realizing that any reliable information before me about the disease was worth the time and effort to try and understand as much as I could about the disease. It became clear to me that the studies/research articles I read, plus advice and direction about prostate cancer and testing from my own urologist and family doctor, was doubly beneficial.

You may be thinking why should I care about this? I'm healthy without symptoms. I said the same thing once. Then things changed. In a routine exam the doc felt a rough spot, ordered a biopsy which revealed a diagnosis of bilateral prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer in the U.S. When *diagnosed early the outcome is very good*. Every year more than 230,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer; approximately 30,000 die with the disease. And annually the number increases as the male population ages.

So who is at high risk for developing the disease? The Center for Disease Control says African Americans, men 50 years or older, and men whose father, brother, or son had prostate cancer. Obesity is also a risk factor.

Early warning signs of Prostate Cancer (Mayo Clinic)

- *frequent urination*
- *decreased force in the urination stream*
- *blood in the urine*
- *general pain in the lower back, hips, thighs*
- *discomfort in the pelvic area*
- *bone pain*
- *erectile dysfunction*

These symptoms do not necessarily mean prostate cancer. Don't jump to conclusions. Always talk to your doctor if you experience the above systems. Even with all the confusion and inconsistencies about getting a checkup, major national prostate cancer support organizations urge men to ***talk to their doctors before deciding to forgo annual prostate checkups.***

Bottom line: If you are a man 50 or older, you have a one-in-seven chance of developing prostate cancer in your lifetime. Those aren't good odds. Your family wants you around for a very long time. Think about them before deciding the *no-test* issue.

Perspective – There was a point in time when I received phone calls from some men or a family member wanting to talk about all things prostate. Listening closely, I could hear the fear. Men were worried about physical intimacy, side effects of treatment, incontinence, pain, fear of dying, or a radical change of life style. Looking back, I realized callers just wanted to talk to someone who had traveled the road they were on, someone to listen to them and not give medical advice. A caller once said that he had discussed his diagnosis with family and friends who were empathetic but could not be objective. They were too emotionally involved to help him plan a realistic strategy to deal with the disease. Above all, he just wanted a listening ear and reliable information regarding his diagnosis and the perspective of another experience.

Support Groups – *What are they and what goes on in their meetings?* If you, a family member or friend have been diagnosed with prostate cancer and have concerns, I would strongly encourage you to attend a support group. Before you think “*thanks but no thanks,*” at least give it some serious thought. It will be a good opportunity for you to gain first-hand knowledge from understanding men who will share their own prostate experience with you. They will listen to your concerns and answer questions. (They are not, however, qualified to dispense medical advice; that is your doctor's role.) The local chapter of Sierra Vista UsTOO Prostate Cancer Support Group, founded 1990 meet at the Wellness Depot in the Sierra Vista Mall (next to Sears) on the last Friday of the month at 9:00am. Meetings last about an hour with open discussions, and at times an expert guest speaker will be featured.



Willie Cotton, Jr. (1924-2013) Founding Member

When you attend you'll find friendly fellowship, good-natured humor from men and women who care about you and what you have experienced; they will listen to your concerns. You can sit in and simply observe or share and ask questions. It's a relaxed, informal hour. Plan to attend at least one meeting to see and understand what goes on. You will meet some of the best down-to-earth people you will ever know. **It's a place where no man diagnosed with prostate cancer and his family ever stand alone.** For more information about the meeting and this caring, courageous *band of brothers*, contact Bob at 803-6773, cell 508-2024, norquist1@gmail.com; or Paul at 456-7347, cell 508-9850, paulgrillo90@gmail.com.

See you at the meeting!
The Savvy Survivor.

Afterword . . .

A good informative web site to check out: *Medical News Today, The Latest Prostate Cancer News.* I

was surprised to read how much is happening in the prostate cancer world.
Coming in the next *Prostate Cancer Smarts Newsletter: Survivors' Stories In Their Own Words*.