

Become Your Own Advocate

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I. Obtain Information and Develop Dialogue

When you encounter a diagnosis of prostate cancer, do your homework and involve your wife or partner, and the selection of a medical professional is key. You will be with that person for the rest of your life, and you have to be able to make sure that you consult all of the different therapies. The doctors that you are talking to must understand your fears and concerns, and the skill of that particular doctor is extremely important. You have to do quite a bit of research to make sure that the person or persons you are aligning yourself with have the skill that you require to handle your diagnosis.

Their communication style is also very important, and, for instance, some of the urologists, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists that we meet have great difficulty talking about erectile dysfunction. The communication style and the whole spectrum of what a prostate cancer consumer and caregiver go through are really important. In selecting a medical professional, it is important also to cover what support services are available such as rehabilitation, professional colleagues and other patient contacts, support groups.

II. Prepare Questions

In all of the stages, patients and caregivers need to prepare well thought-through questions. Coming to grips with the diagnosis is a traumatic thing, and it's a bit like climbing a massive mountain. Take it in easy stages. Getting over the diagnosis of cancer is a great step, but then choosing the right treatment option for you is a serious decision. Once you choose an option, it is a great weight off your shoulders because you have chosen what is right for you, you have become your own advocate, you have checked everything out and with your partner you have decided on a treatment option, which is a massive relief. The treatment itself is the easy part, though things can go wrong, because you're locked into a system, you do everything that you're told, you get on with it and hopefully you come out the other side. When you get through treatment, you want to cure the cancer, you want perfect continence and you want full erectile function. The recovery and rehabilitation is a challenge to some because things do go wrong, and sometimes it takes a good bit of time to get back continence and erectile function. It is a key area, and you really need to do your homework with questions prepared for the people who are giving you advice. In the case of advanced cancer, when you are preparing to tackle your situation, again, consider well thought-through questions so that you can understand what is happening to you.

III. Get Involved

The encouragement we give to individuals who are diagnosed with prostate cancer is to talk with other patients that have been through the same process. Good doctors and support groups match patients up, and they don't mind you talking to people who have been through a similar experience. They encourage you because the more involved their patients are and the more they talk to others with experience, they better off they are. We suggest that patients participate in support groups and become their own advocate and then also move to becoming an advocate for others because knowledge is

power and you gain the confidence of medical professionals when you do that. It is very important to talk to your family, friends and colleagues, and the effect it can have is amazing. Spread the word because early diagnosis is key.

This is another of life's journeys. Get involved with managing your diagnosis and everything that goes with it. Be your own advocate, and the people that we encourage to be part of support groups are people who are well over their own diagnosis. Those who aren't over it yet are the wrong people to talk to others who have just been diagnosed. Take the journey of a prostate cancer diagnosis by the scruff of the neck and do as much as you can to arm yourself with as much knowledge and support as you can get.