

Prostate Cancer Battle

by

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A Straight Talking Doctor

“Hi doctor, how are you today?” I enquired as I bounced into my doctor’s surgery in Leominster one fine morning in September 2000.

“Oh I’m fine, but it’s you that has to worry as you won’t be here by Christmas,” my doctor replied while remaining sitting at his desk with a deep frown on his face.

“Won’t I be here? Well where am I going? I’ve got no plans to go away,” I cheerfully replied.

“No, you’re not going away, you’ve got a very high level of prostate cancer and you’ll be dead by Christmas,” the doctor replied while making no effort to rise from his chair to greet me. *So much for his bedside manner!*

And so began the many months of anguish, worry and fear that were to eventually end with my reprieve from death and the start of another life.

A Second Opinion

To say that I was shocked by the doctor’s blunt message would be an understatement. I couldn’t take it in. My brain refused to accept it. Me dead by Christmas? That was utter nonsense as I had so much to do. Amongst other things I was in the process of writing a book about Caratacus and the early Celts and that had to be finished before I could go anywhere!

After taking a few deep breaths and wrestling with the problem for a few minutes I sat down *unbidden* in the chair opposite the doctor and faced him across his desk. I still couldn’t accept or believe what he had just told me so I asked him, “Are you sure? Have I really got prostate cancer and it’s terminal?”

“Yes, your recent blood test shows a PSI count of 69 and that’s fatal so you had better start getting used to it,” he replied with a deadpan face.

Phew, what could I say? My mind was in a whirl and I just sat there with all sorts of frightening thoughts going through my head, but after a while my brain slowed down and I began to think coherently. “Is this true and has he got it right?” I asked myself. “What if he has got it wrong or there has been a mistake. Should I just take this one man’s word for it?”

I must have wrestled with this problem for a few minutes before deciding that I just couldn’t take his word alone and must seek further information and advice.

“Can I have a second opinion about this?” I finally asked.

“Yes,” he replied, “but that won’t be available on the NHS before next February”

“But that’s stupid!” I exclaimed. “According to you I’ll be dead long before that, but if I pay for it can I have a second opinion done quickly?”

“Well, yes, I can arrange that,” he replied – and so began a whirlwind week of tests, more tests and a few days in a hospital bed, all of which was done privately but at a reasonable cost when set against the continuance of my life.

The Specialist

Within twenty-four hours of first hearing the news from my doctor I was sitting opposite a specialist in Hereford BUPA Hospital. *The offer to pay for a second opinion certainly worked wonders.*

Those twenty-four hours had been a time of frantic conversations with my family and my gradual acceptance that perhaps the time had come for me to move on to a new beginning. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat and my thoughts kept shooting about all over the place. Fortunately my older brother Reg had his feet on the ground

and he helped guide me through the following week's activity, including the consultations with the specialist.

Unlike my doctor, the specialist was a very caring man and he passed unpalatable information on in a gentle manner. He first of all explained everything we needed to know about prostate cancer and then arranged for another blood test. After receipt of the result of that test and a physical examination he then more or less confirmed my doctor's diagnosis. The PSI count was so high that avoidance of death was unlikely – although there were a few faint possibilities that it could be delayed.

Clutching at straws, my brother and I listened carefully to the specialist's every word as he told us of four procedures that might – and only might enable me to keep my health, including special tablets, radiography, chemotherapy and an operation to deprive the cancer of its food.

While breaking for coffee I discussed the possible treatments with my brother and then decided to risk all on the treatment that deprived the cancer of food. Just two days later I had a testostomy operation in the same hospital which dramatically reduced my PSI count - and it has remained below four ever since. *My Celtic gods were certainly with me at that moment in my life!*

A Testostomy

The testostomy operation was quick, painless and completely successful. I spent only two days in hospital, after which I was able to walk without difficulty and allowed home.

My testes had been the main source of testosterone for the cancer to feed on and their removal deprived it of this supply, curtailing its growth and causing it to go into remission. There followed a few visits to the hospital for checkups and changes of dressings but very little physical aftercare was needed.

Emotional Aftercare

The emotional aftercare, however, was another matter. Physical changes in my body, impotency and weight gain were included, with hot sweats being the greatest problem of them all. These hot sweats would frequently descend on me and it would feel that my head was boiling. They were very uncomfortable indeed.

Help was at hand, however, in the form of tablets that my doctor prescribed for me. Taken every day they certainly controlled the sweats and helped me to lead a normal life - at first!

Two years down the line though, I developed another problem in that I would suddenly become very aggressive to the point of being dangerous. My best friend watched this happen and eventually persuaded me to go to a new doctor for a check up, when it was discovered that one of the tablets I was taking was the problem. This tablet produced a side effect of aggression and should only have been taken for a maximum of six months – not the four times that length of time that it was being prescribed for me! Naturally I immediately stopped taking it and in no time my 'balanced' character was back to normal, with even the sweats greatly reduced. *The cure was almost worse than the disease!*

Why I was so Lucky

I am a reasonably lucky person and many good things have happened to me in my life, but my natural forcefulness certainly helped my luck on this occasion.

For some weeks prior to going to my doctor for the result of the prostate cancer blood test I had visited him on a number of occasions to complain of feeling

unnaturally tired. The tiredness was exceptional and would come upon me at odd moments when it felt as though a blanket of tiredness dragged itself up my shoulders and over my head, leaving me utterly drained.

Each time I went to the doctor he examined me and sent me for blood tests, then diagnosed the problem as being my age or the weather etc. Well I wasn't satisfied with that and, after seeing an advert on TV for prostate cancer blood tests, I insisted on being tested for it.

Sure enough, my blood test revealed that I did have a very high level of prostate cancer – but the operation revealed that the cancer was still confined to the prostate. It had not escaped outside the prostate to terminate my life, as it would have done had there been any further delay. My insistence on an early blood test, followed by a firm decision on the action to be taken, had contained the cancer and enabled me to live to tell the tale. ***I was the lucky one!***

Now, eight years on I have finished the historical action novel I was writing and details of it can be seen at <http://www.emissarytothegods.com>

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