

Member Commentary: Hello, You have Cancer!

Fred Grauer, *Reprinted with permission from Modern Car Care*

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One of the scariest phone calls you can ever receive is when the voice on the other end says, “Your test results are back; they were positive. You have cancer.” What a slug to the gut. One moment you’re tooling down the road, listening to some tunes thinking, “Wow! Life is good,” and the next moment your urologist calls with this gut-wrenching news.

Pow! You quickly go from rock ‘n’ roll to dirges. The big “C” — a word you’d prefer never to hear — is now looming like the Incredible Hulk, standing between you and that laid-back retirement you have been planning for years.

Every year since turning 40 I have had an annual physical in which blood tests were taken and the results delivered to my primary care physician. I would then have my conference with the doctor. He’d check my statistics and talk to me about how I was doing.

Two of the tests had to do with my prostate: one with the results of a specific antigen in my blood (PSA) and the other a digital exam where the doctor looks for any abnormal aspects of the prostate. PSA results have been used as a guide to identify changes within the prostate that could signal the presence of cancer.

In my case, my PSA showed a change of one point in a year. And even though “officially” my score of 2.5 was far less than the “official” red flag of 4.5, the one point change was a yellow flag. During my review with the doctor, our discussion focused on the results of my blood test and what would be the next steps.

To Panic or Not?

Family history plays a major role in determining risk and thus is an important factor in determining a strategy. My father and brother both were prostate cancer victims. In Dad’s case, the treatment and knowledge of prostate cancer 35 years ago was far less effective than today, and as a result, he was left with residual complications of impotency and incontinence. He lived an additional 30 years before passing away, and prostate cancer was not the cause of death.

My brother’s cancer was more advanced. He opted for surgery, which is just one of several ways to treat the disease.

With our family history of cancer, the odds of me also getting cancer were about one in three. In other words, to ignore the warning signs would not have been too smart.

The next step was to get a biopsy, have the results read by a top pathologist and, then based on the results, formulate a plan. As you already know, the results were positive. I didn’t panic, though. I called my wife and children immediately to tell them the news and set up an

appointment with the urologist to discuss options. My urologist preferred surgery, but we also talked about two other frequently used treatment options: radiation and radioactive seed placement within the prostate.

Be Informed

Unfortunately there is no absolute right or wrong way to approach prostate cancer. Oncologists will tell you that in some cases it's a slow-growing cancer so there is no rush to making a decision. For me, I didn't like the idea of waiting around. Prostate cancer is a "silent killer;" you don't feel anything until it's in an advanced stage and has spread to other organs.

Some specialists also will tell you that death by prostate cancer is extremely painful. If that isn't enough to motivate you to action, I'm not sure what is.

To learn about my disease, I read books, downloaded articles from the Internet, and started asking friends if they had friends with prostate cancer who would feel comfortable with me interviewing them. The more I asked, the more cancer patients and survivors offered to speak with me and share their stories. The outpouring of support and sharing was huge in my ability to narrow down the treatment I would select, as well as in dealing with the everyday concerns of a life-threatening disease.

I don't know if I was just lucky or fortunate to be guided in the right direction by a lot of caring people. The diagnosed men I interviewed all had chosen one of four ways to handle their disease with varying degrees of success, depending on the severity of their diagnosis.

In addition, because of our family history and my brother going through a similar process a year earlier, I was introduced to a number of prostate cancer experts. I was very fortunate to be exposed to the best of the best. The president and CEO of the Prostate Cancer Foundation, Dr. Jonathan Simons, even took a personal interest in me and was a great help in guiding me toward sound decisions.

I also interviewed a top-rated radiologist (who had just published a book on the subject), a top surgeon who operated on my brother and is credited with a nerve-sparing technique, and Douglas Tippin, the doctor who finally treated me.

For my treatment, I ultimately chose a technique called brachytherapy which involves the placement of radioactive pellets directly into the prostate. I decided on brachytherapy based on the interview I had with Dr. Tippin and the fact that he laid out all the statistics. When I left his office, my wife Louise and I knew what to expect. At my level of cancer, we decided this was the best approach, and I certainly would make the same choice today.

The Need to Talk

As time has passed and I am now showing good test results, I have had time to reflect on my experience. One thing that became really clear was that I needed to be open about my disease and share my experience in the same way that so many other men shared their stories with me.

We men are terrible about discussing things we construe as affecting our masculinity, and the prostate and cancer certainly would be at the top of the list! So like those who stepped up to the plate to help me, I needed to repay that debt.

The carwash industry is a male-dominated business. I don't know the statistics, but I would guess that the majority of men within our industry are older than 40. How many of you know your family history or take the time for an annual physical?

September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, and all men and their families should be aware of this lurking, silent killer. Please do yourself, your family, friends and business associates a favor and don't become a statistic!

My cancer experience certainly has been one of those adventures I could have done without, but that's not the way the cards were dealt. If you are either living with or beginning the same adventure, there is a lot of good news and developments in research and treatments.

Wouldn't it be terrific if we, as an industry, took time at our carwashes during Prostate Cancer Awareness Month to raise money for a cure and provide information for our customers about this important health concern?

If you agree, let your national and local associations know. Together, greater awareness and education can help save lives and spare families and businesses the pain of losing a husband, dad, boyfriend, friend or business associate. Just think of the power we could have in helping to find a cure and save a life!