

## Dealing with Prostate Cancer Second Hand

### Bradley Foster MA

Having experienced prostate cancer first hand I can attest to the shock of the diagnosis, the fear of staring death in the face, the anger of “why me?”, the grief of possibly having my life shortened, the sadness of realizing how alone I am facing the uncertainties of treatment and recovery.

Prostate cancer is a disease that affects not only its victims but those close to them. It's a cruel ordeal for men, but it's often made worse for their partners when they refuse to talk about it. Partners experience the same feelings of anger, fear and grief as their husbands, but when men refuse to openly discuss their feelings, their partners also feel helpless, frustrated, resentful and guilty. Unresolved feelings between a couple can seriously impair the communication in their relationship at a time when they need each other the most.

As we know, most men avoid talking about personal issues and even the most willing of us shut up tighter than clams when it has to do with our sexual health. To compensate we men get busy with technical matters and are usually willing to discuss the merits of surgery versus radiation or laparoscopic versus brachytherapy treatments as if we were talking about lawn mowers at Canadian Tire. When hit by the careening bus of irrationality and uncertainty, we retreat to the safety of logic and a rational choice of technology.

So what can you do if your spouse has opted to go through prostate cancer hell without you? Seeing cancer as a challenge to overcome rather than as an insidious disease eating away at your spouse is a good start. My advice is to support yourself and realize that thousands of women in Canada have gone through the same test as you. At times the dark thoughts and feelings can be overwhelming but try to take it one day at a time and realize that with time things will become clearer and less uncertain.

Find out if there is a prostate cancer support group in your area. If so ask if it has a spousal support group. Many prostate cancer support groups offer help and advice to the partners of men with prostate cancer. (see the sidebar for more information). Scan the web for on-line forums where you can find support from women in your position.

It is important to talk to someone knowledgeable who can help you work through feelings that come up for you. Health care professionals, therapists, coaches, or religious leaders are there to help support you in your time of need. Your doctor or local hospital may also be able to direct you to someone who will listen.

September is prostate cancer awareness month. If your spouse has received a diagnosis or is at risk, this is an excellent time to make yourself aware of the rich sources of information and support available to you and your partner. Don't think twice to reach out.

Bradley Foster survived prostate cancer and is a better person for it. He now helps others by coaching men and their partners through the ordeal. Bradley Foster is a head coach of Knightsbridge Coaching. He can be reached at [Bradley@Knightsbridgecoaching.com](mailto:Bradley@Knightsbridgecoaching.com).

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