

Howdy. My name is John Tassi. I've been very active all of my life. Skating, biking, swimming, hiking, just about anything athletic. But in 2007 things changed. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. What a shock! I have cancer and I'm going to die!

Well, after my wife and I hugged and cried for several days, the initial shock wore off. All the things that were racing through my mind started to slow and eventually gave way to more rational thoughts. I got a second opinion. Both doctors recommended surgery. They were both highly respected urologists and they both said I needed to cut out the cancer. So I did.

For the next 8 months I thought I'd beaten it! Life was good again. The doctors were right ...or were they. Then the bad news, my PSA started rising again. The surgery failed. What now? More hugging and crying with my wife. But now I decided to become more informed about the disease that was trying to kill me.

I started researching the disease. I spent many late nights scrubbing the internet ... what a confusing, mish-mash of contradicting miss-information. I looked into all options and decided to consult more doctors. After several weeks of consults, I decided on IMRT to radiate the prostate bed then follow up with chemo to kill any rogue cells that had escaped the prostate bed, and androgen deprivation therapy to further ensure any cancer cells that remained would be destroyed. What a grueling 7 months. But, so far, my PSA is undetectable.

The one good thing I did find on the internet was the Informed Prostate Cancer Support Group (IPCSG) website. They had monthly meetings here in San Diego. I was hesitant to attend ... probably a bunch of old farts that didn't know anything, but just wanted to get out of the house and away from the wives once a month to hang out and talk about the good old days. That couldn't have been further from the truth.

I attended my first meeting. What a wealth of knowledge. This group has men that have gone through the same thing I was going through. They were supportive and very informative. I have been a member of this group ever since.

Looking back at my PSA history, the warning signs were there prior to my diagnosis. Unfortunately, the doctors missed it.

My Prostate Cancer Timeline

1999 PSA = 1.1, DRE normal. I was 44 years old.

2002 PSA = 2.4, DRE normal.

2004 PSA = 3.5, DRE normal. At age 49 I had prostate cancer, but the doctors missed it.

2005 the doctors diagnosed me with BPH (incorrect diagnosis)

2007 PSA = 19, DRE normal. That's when the doctors realized something was wrong.

December 2007 a Biopsy revealed I had prostate cancer. Gleason score was R=3+3, L=3+4.

February 2008 I had a Robotic assist Radical Prostatectomy. After the surgery my pathology report indicated a higher gleason score than the biopsy showed, both sides were 4 + 5 and I had positive margins. Approximately 25% of the prostate had cancer cells.

After surgery, my PSA was undetectable until October 2008 when it started rising. The PSA velocity showed it doubling every 2 months. This is a sign of a very aggressive cancer. So aggressive measures had to be taken!

Between December 2008 and February 2009 I had 37 courses of IMRT.

Between February 2009 and May 2009 I had 5 chemo sessions.

In March 2009, I started a 12-month course of ADT (Trelstar Depot IM injection every 3 months)

So far, my PSA is undetectable.

Conclusion

I can't emphasize enough; you need to be your own case manager! You need to know your disease. Don't rely on your doctor to keep track of your health. After you walk out of your doctor's office, he/she won't think about you until you step foot in their office for your next appointment. You need to keep copies of all tests and know what your test results mean. You need to stay on top of the latest prostate cancer news. You need to be comfortable and confident with your therapy decisions.

The best way to achieve all of the above is through education. You need to know as much as possible about the disease that is trying to take your life.