

APPRECIATION OF LIFE – PROSTATE CANCER

Steve Hentzen

While undergoing a physical so I could attend a Boy Scout summer camp with my son, my physician ordered standard tests for a 46 year old male, including a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test. I had no indication that anything was wrong, but my PSA level was high, which can indicate cancer. After additional tests and consultation with several specialists, I was diagnosed with Stage IIC prostate cancer and proceeded with surgery to remove my prostate. My PSA went from 19 to 0.07, but 0.00 is optimal. We discussed additional treatment but decided to continue monitoring my level. A year later, my PSA began to rise and I opted for eight weeks of “salvage radiation,” which is radiating where the prostate used to be. My PSA went down again but was not completely gone. We continue careful monitoring every six months.

Before my diagnosis I was overweight, smoked and didn't work out. A good friend motivated me to get healthy and now I'm physically fit and feeling great. Typically, guys don't talk about this disease, but it's not healthy to keep it in. I joined a support group, which eventually led to formation of Prostate Network (www.ProstateNetwork.org), a grassroots organization of survivors and partners to raise awareness and spread hope.

Much research is being conducted around prostate cancer, and it is our fervent hope that national consensus on screening and treatment guidelines will soon be a reality. Without this consensus, it is critical to raise public awareness about prostate cancer, and for healthcare providers to explore screening options with their patients. Early detection and targeted treatment is vital to successfully fighting this disease.

My PSA is still not at 0.00 and there is some fear associated with that but I channel my emotions into helping others. Through this journey, I've developed true appreciation for the life I once took for granted. I can now focus on what's important – enjoying every minute of every single day, surrounded by the people who matter most.

