

Linda Garshon (wife of survivor Jerry Garshon):

When Aaron asked me to speak on this panel, I said to my husband, Jerry, who is sitting in the audience, what will I talk about? He replied, "Not to worry, you are never at a loss for words".

So here goes:

When Jerry was diagnosed 5 years and 6 months ago (and who's counting?) we really were not too familiar with the prostate, where it was and what it did. We just knew that the prostate was felt with a digital rectal examination and Jerry had to pay for his PSA test every year. All we knew was that the PSA tests were fine and "see you next year". At his yearly physical exam in December of 1998, my husband thought there might be something wrong when his family doctor, during his annual digital rectal exam, took much longer than usual. The doctor said that the prostate felt less soft on the left side, but that it was probably nothing. However, since his PSA had risen from 2.6 to 4.4, his doctor recommended that he see a urologist. The urologist also said that it was probably not cancer, but he recommended that a biopsy be taken anyway. It was our family doctor who came to our house to tell us that two biopsy samples on the left side, out of a total of 12, were malignant with a Gleason score of 7. Our whole world came to a halt.

I must admit that we were very naïve about prostate cancer, and all that it entails. Cancer at the best of times is a scary word. I went on the internet and got information overload. We were fortunate enough to have a family doctor who assured us that it was caught in the early stages and he felt that treatment would take care of it. But what about incontinence and impotence, would these be permanent? We could only wait until treatment

was over before we knew for sure. The best we could do was to take one day at a time.

The urologist recommended a radical prostatectomy. We asked for a second opinion and were given the same options and advice. My husband asked about seed implants, and was told that he did not qualify for Brachytherapy because he had a Gleason score of 7. He decided to go with the second urologist, who performed the surgery within two months. To have the surgery was entirely his decision and I kept all of my opinions to myself (which for me was difficult). Before the surgery my husband banked two units of his own blood that turned out not to be needed in the surgery, and was prescribed iron pills. The surgery went well, with minimal bleeding, and the cancer being found to be contained within the prostate.

Our children were at the hospital constantly with our three granddaughters. The four-year-old was fascinated with the catheter and thought her grandfather had a rather large penis. We had to explain. She ran into all the hospital rooms checking out catheter bags.

The catheter was in for a total of three weeks and I learned to change and wash the bag. When some scab residue blocked my husband's urethra, I learned how to irrigate the catheter as well. It's amazing the nursing skills you can pick up. We had bought a large assortment of diapers and pads but three days after the catheter came out, Jerry was totally continent, which he feels is due, in part, to the Kegel exercises that he performed. I believe most men are more concerned with incontinence than erectile dysfunction, referred to as ED.

The doctor told us that my husband had a nerve-sparing operation. However, we were told it can take up to 2 years for the nerves to overcome the trauma of surgery, in order for potency to return. Have patience. Jerry was also in two clinical trials to test new pills, for impotence. He kept saying he thought he got the placebo because they did nothing for him, but at the time he was also on a blood pressure pill that I believe had a lot to do with his ED. I'm happy to report that when he cut his blood pressure medication back to half a pill a day, his potency improved.

With faith, family and medical support, and a sense of humour, this traumatic experience can be overcome. We are indebted to the Man-to-Man and Side-by-Side support groups in affiliation with the Canadian Cancer Society who helped us immensely in dealing and coping with our concerns.

Thank you.