

## *When Healthy People Get Cancer, Like Me*

When I took this job as Director of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, I felt it was important that I not only act the part of being the "fitness guru" for the state, but also look the part. I referred back to my NBA training camp frame of mind and made sure I put all the right foods in my body, implemented a football workout regimen with strength training, engaged in cross-fitness and agility drills so that my aging body would stand the test of time. A good friend of mine convinced me to start playing tennis and I even went back to cross-country running--clocking three miles a day with eight minute and twenty-four second splits. For a guy my age (55 years-old), that's pretty damn good!

When receiving word that I had stage one prostate cancer, it seems that the entire world stopped. I froze immediately while crossing the street as my urologist gave me the news on my cell phone. Shocked and in disbelief, this six-letter word brought about more fear in me than any crisis I've ever experienced in my lifetime. Can I tell you the testing of my faith rose to the tenth power just by hearing the "C" word! When my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and hearing how close friends and other relatives were diagnosed with this same horrible disease, I would throw up a quick prayer each time: "Lord, please don't ever give me this fight." Well, this fight came to me on March 24 of this year and my life has not been the same since.

After receiving this devastating news, I did not want to tell anyone outside my family circle and close friends. I wanted a sense of normalcy, not wanting anyone to feel sorry for me and give the impression I was bringing too much attention to myself. Although my work at times comes with much media attention, I just didn't want folks to think my condition was a publicity stunt for more media attention. So for the most part, I kept my condition to myself for a long time. Another reason for my withdrawal was that if you tell some people you have cancer, they will immediately say unintentional hurtful things like: "I know somebody that had cancer once and they died within a few months." That is the last thing you want to hear. When friends of mine said things like that it brought me down, depressed me. Take it from me, if someone confides in you that they have cancer or any other potentially fatal disease, don't tell them what you heard or you know somebody that had it and didn't do well. Just politely say, "I am praying for you, and wish you the best outcome; and if there is anything I can do to help, just call."

So now, how can a man like me, as a well-conditioned athlete who received over the years glowing reports from all his doctors: cardiologists, urologists and my PCP end up being diagnosed with prostate cancer? My blood pressure was perfect. My heart was still beating like a well-trained athlete, and my dietary intake consisted of fruits and veggies, no fast foods, no soft drinks, only plenty of water and juices. "Damn Doc! How did this get by me?" One word my urologist reminded me: genetics. As I questioned family members around the country about their health status, a number of them at some point in their lives were diagnosed with prostate cancer. Luckily for me and my kinfolk, we all did the one thing that is preached over and over

again: get your yearly checkups. I never missed an appointment, and like my father before me, I was always on time.

There is one more element that may have caused my prostate cancer. Although it's not scientifically proven, the date when I received the call concerning my diagnosis was only four months after my last checkup. I too suffer from sinus problems like everyone else, but my biggest allergic reaction comes from second-hand cigarette smoke. I woke up one morning feeling miserable after running into a group of people smoking outside the bowling lanes the day before. I didn't have time to call my doctor for an appointment because of a series of important meetings and presentations scheduled outside of Baton Rouge. So, I looked into my medicine cabinet and found some old Nyquil cold and sinus liquid and started taking that for relief. And if that wasn't enough, while on the road I was taking Mucinex liquid for congestion. Two days later, I woke up urinating every 15 minutes. I went into a panic and called my doctor and we both thought it was prostatitis, which is an inflammation of the prostate gland. Then he fussed at me and said, "Have you been taking those over-the-counter sinus medicines again?" In a child-like manner I replied, "Yep, I did."

When antibiotics my doctor prescribed didn't work, he called me in for a checkup to see why my problem persisted. Remember, I just had a prostate exam four months earlier, and this was so puzzling to both of us. After a thorough exam and biopsy, it was determined I had stage one cancer, the slow moving kind with no fingers attached to it. I then began to do some research on how over-the-counter cold and sinus medications that contain decongestants or antihistamines can increase benign prostatic hyperplasia or also known as BPH. It may be that one or several of these over-the-counter medicines played a part in triggering one of the cancer cells in my body and made it rise to the surface. I have no scientific proof, but the timing sure seems strange.

So, my doctor tells me to stay away from over-the-counter medicines such as Tylenol Sinus, Benadryl, Nyquil in any form, Mucinex liquid and nasal sprays. These cold, allergy and sinus medications that contain the decongestant pseudoephedrine can wreak havoc for men with enlarged prostates. It's important that people, especially men, take the time to have your doctor prescribe sinus medicines for you. These over-the-counter medicines scientifically may or may not have caused my prostate cancer, but that was the only thing I did differently outside my normal daily routines during the time.

Now the time had come to break the news to my family. I counseled with them and close friends to decide the best treatment option. I chose to have the prostatectomy that involved removing the prostate through a cut made in the lower abdomen. This technique allows surgeons to remove not only the prostate but also any nearby lymph nodes that have become cancerous. Nerve-sparing techniques are now widely used to preserve urinary control and sexual function. After much prayer, I felt this was best for me. People faced with such an important decision such as this should make sure to get as much information as possible and include family in their decision.

As for me and my weird luck, four days after my prostate surgery, my gall bladder decided it was his turn to act up. I had to have emergency surgery to remove it too! This put me back in the hospital for five more days! Whew! Okay, Lord, two major surgeries in two weeks? I'm not gonna lie, Me and God had a serious talk! My message to all men over forty years of age is this: ***Own Your Own Health*** by getting yearly prostate exams and encourage other men to do so. I am living proof that the healthiest, strongest people in the world can get cancer. Just because you may feel good with no symptoms of being sick doesn't mean you shouldn't get annual checkups. Because of early detection, my future looks bright. I even have a chance of seeing my 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and hopefully see LSU Basketball win a national championship! That's what I'm talkin' bout!

I thank God for putting doctors and nurses on this earth to help heal us, and I am thankful for my family, co-workers, close friends and even my hundreds of fans on Face Book for supporting me and keeping me in their prayers. I hope I helped someone with my story, and I hope that this chain of love doesn't stop here. Until then,

Go Well, Stay Well—

