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Avalon Prostate Cancer Support Group Donates to Daffodil Place

Scott Antle, acting Executive Director of the Canadian Cancer Society, NL division, accepts a \$1000 cheque from the Avalon Prostate Cancer Support Group. The donation was made at the regular monthly support group meeting at the Elks Club on Tuesday evening, March 2, and is to be used to cover the fuel cost for one year for the volunteer driving program for cancer patients getting to and from treatment. On hand to make the presentation were executive members of the Avalon Group. Mr. Antle pointed out that this service is provided to guests of Daffodil Place and to patients staying in and around the city. The new volunteer driving vehicle and the concentration of guests staying at Daffodil Place has definitely improved the service. The volunteer driving program vehicle at Daffodil Place, operated solely by volunteers, is providing 150-200 drives on average each month.



On behalf of the Cancer Society, he extended a sincere thank you to the prostate cancer support group and praised them for their valuable support to cancer patients throughout the province.

2010 Events Calendar

**Walk a Mile
Father's Day Weekend
&
September Awareness
Month**

**Provincial Conference
Max Simms Memorial Camp
October 1-2nd
(Details to follow)**

**PCCN Conference
September 22-25th
(Details to follow)**



Walk a Mile in His Shoes

Walk a Mile is a pledge-based walk that occurs in numerous sites throughout the province for the purpose of increasing prostate cancer awareness. Now in its eleventh year, this well established event continues to highlight the importance of regular prostate examinations and the benefit of early detection of prostate cancer. The walk a mile funds are managed by the NL division of the Canadian Cancer Society and are used primarily to promote prostate cancer awareness and to provide patient support. Each year approximately \$80,000 is raised. This year, the challenge to all participants and supporters is to surpass the success of the previous year and to help fight this dreaded disease.

For your information, in 2009 there were 23 sites and the top site was Labrador City, \$17,665. The top provincial fundraiser (\$4300) was Jim Buffett, Labrador City. The three provincial draw winners (selected from the top fundraisers from each site) were Ed Smith (Clareville), Ron Pond (Glovertown) and Clem Haley (Carbonear). Congratulations to all participants and prize winners and a special thank you to our event supporters and great volunteers.

If you plan to walk in your area in 2010, please call Lindsey at 757-8537 or 1-888-753-6520. We look forward to the continuation of our existing sites and will greatly appreciate the addition of any new site. Together, we can ease the pain of a prostate cancer diagnosis.

Things I learned from Prostate Cancer

Bill Kennedy, Avalon Prostate Cancer Support Group

January 2010



There are many wise sayings which inform us what life is or how best to live life. For example, “It isn’t how long one lives, it is how one lives.” “Life consists of ups and downs.” “Meet adversity head on.” Each of these are meaningful in their own way and are to some extent soul soothing. However, in and of themselves they are somewhat shallow. We all know them but for the most part don’t apply them to our particular life style. I prefer the old Latin phrase *Experientia Docet* (experience teaches) because I feel it speaks directly to life and to living. There is something about experiencing or going through the ups and downs of life that shapes our thinking and emotions and that makes us truly appreciate just what life for “me” is really all about. Albert Camus said “you can’t create experience, you have to undergo it.” In this sense, experience is more than a cliché, it is a living process. We are all different from one another and have a particular individual way of experiencing the world and how we choose to play out our “lived” lives. This individuality that we inherently possess makes all the various clichés and so called “wise “ sayings regarding how we should see and live our lives somewhat too general. However, how we interpret our experience is individual specific. Experience teaches us about the way we actually live our lives and becomes a compass for life’s journey. Wise sayings merely suggest how we may live. Experience gives meaning to life as lived and teaches us how best to live it. As we internalize our experiences we learn to live life from within.

After ten years of living with and experiencing prostate cancer I have come to see it as part of me, not as a disease but part of me like an educational tool that inspires me to learn. It has in a sense become my life teacher. From this teacher I have learned the following:

1. To feel comfortable with the word **cancer**. Part of the recovery from cancer is mastering the dread and extreme fear that “I received a death sentence”. I was convinced at first that my life was about to end and it was time to say my good byes. The word cancer rang in my ears day and night. However, through discussions with my wife and with others in a similar situation and through reading and research I learned that instead of life ending with prostate cancer this was part of the journey along life’s walk and another obstacle to overcome.
2. Family and friends are your best support in times of torment and turmoil. A partner who cares and listens and tolerates your mood swings makes cancer diagnosis and living with cancer so much more bearable.
3. If it doesn’t kill it makes you strong. Accepting cancer diagnosis garners up all your inner resources. As Holmes said what lies behind and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. You learn to say, like the little train that could, yes I can yes I can. I learned to see and appreciate that deep spirit of survival that is inherent in human kind. This survival drive shows its true worth in times of physical and emotional turmoil
4. I learned the power of positive thinking. I knew of course but never really had it tested that there is no benefit from dwelling on what may happen or what can go wrong. It is tough to get your head around the fact that you have cancer. Why me? What did I do wrong? There are plenty of negative thoughts. However underneath these lie an equal number of positive ones. The trick to moving on with life lies in molding the negative thoughts and feelings into positive ones.

5. There are indeed various stages of grief that come into play. They don't necessarily come in textbook sequence. My first was **denial**. I looked the urologist straight in the eyes when he told me I had prostate cancer and said, "You can't be serious." Then the **anger** comes along and of course a little or a lot of **self pity** depending on ones personality. It's boo hoo time and a lot of emotions rise to the surface. Following a kind of tantrum (which is really a good stage to go through) reality sets in and finally there is **acceptance**. At this point I think the Darwinian principle of survival kicks in and you go into "I can beat this" mode. This survival instinct along with acceptance brings the necessary calming effect which allows us to begin the journey towards healing. This journey towards healing can be applied to any obstacle in life. However, before it can take place we have to let go of the self-pity and anger and look for the positive outcomes.

6. I learned to accept mortality. Like teen-agers we grow up thinking that life is eternal and we are invincible. Cancer says hey, you are not invincible, nor immortal so get with the program and as you plunge through the swamps of life ignore the alligators and always look to a brighter future.

7. I learned that the discipline of medicine is not an exact science. It is a science and an art. I have great faith in our urologists and oncologists but they like us make their best decisions based on uncertain science and best guess art that is available to them.

8. I learned that all professionals are amenable to getting a second opinion. We the patients are the ones who are responsible to ask for it. In my case I had a second opinion from urology and oncology. I also had a third opinion as regards to my diagnosis and treatment from the Prostate Cancer Center at St. Margaret's Hospital in Toronto. I made my decision re treatment based on all of these opinions plus those of my wife and other cancer survivors. After ten years I am still happy with the decision.

9. I learned a lot from our support group. This is a great source of confidence building and of course camaraderie.

10. In some weird sense of irony when I underwent cardio atherosclerosis bypass surgery in 2003 much of what I had learned regarding how to approach health problems came from having gone through and survived prostate cancer. Having survived the shock and torment of prostate cancer surgery I approached open heart surgery with the thought that if I survived that one I am going to do the same again. And I did.

11. I have learned that we must be masters of our own health. For too long all people and men in particular have relied on outside forces, like health care providers and family members to inform them what they need to do about their health. This is no longer an option. To borrow from a well-known poem, most of us have learned over the years that we are the masters of our life's journey and we are the captains of our well being. No one else knows our bodies like we do. Some may know how to fix it but only we know how to manage it.

So, life is a journey with many challenges. One of our great challenges is cancer. Yes, we have the odd dribble now and then (now more often than then for some). We have our fears and disappointments with sexual functioning. We are all concerned about reoccurrence. We know too well that like any problem that we encounter in life that early detection is a sure winner. The vast majority of us are fortunate that we got it early, some are not as lucky. However, prostate cancer with all its torments, fears and anxieties needs to be kept in perspective. This is especially relevant in relation to the many health and social issues and challenges that others have. Bearing that in mind we can say, it really isn't too bad after all.

PCCN UPDATE



Dear friends and support group leaders across Canada.

To date 30 groups, representing over 4,000 members have either signed or indicated their intent to sign. In many cases the delay in responding is due to team leaders being on holidays or away for the winter.

We are in the final stages of preparing and distributing a "Welcome Package" that will be sent to all signed groups. Our goal is to have it in the mail by the middle to end of February.

A common concern across the country is the increasing inability to find members to facilitate the groups and because of this many have folded. The issue of 'member retention' and 'team leader succession' will be on the agenda for this year's National Conference and we welcome your input. **Speaking of this year's conference, it is being planned for September 22 to 25 during prostate cancer awareness week, at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto.** This year's event will take a different approach, with less medical education presentation and more learning opportunities, through workshops, in areas like advocacy, team building, awareness, marketing and more. Again, your input is welcome if you have specific topics you would like covered.

A very important part of the conference will be a Support Group session, where you, the support group leaders develop the agenda, develop recommendations and direct the discussion.

There are several exciting projects being developed including a Support Group Handbook, portable display units for loan to groups, our own internet chat room, a new format information kit for the newly diagnosed and a monthly newsletter template.

Our Wake Up Breakfast program is on track for April in many locations across Canada and work has started on the Father's Day Walk/Run.

Personally speaking I want to tell you what a treat it is for me, as managing director of PCCN to visit groups and be part of their decision to join. (The attached photo was taken Jan. 29 when Surrey BC officially joined PCCN.) The enthusiasm from support group members across Canada for our mission is contagious.

It is also very rewarding to be able to work with dedicated, committed team members like Helene Vassos, Tom Fischer, Catherine Patterson and many others in the Toronto office. These people all work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that the needs of groups and individuals are met.

A work of thanks is due to members of the PCCN Advisory Board. These gentlemen, former directors of CPCN from coast to coast, are the driving force behind PCCN. They are your representatives, bringing forward your needs, concerns, and suggestions to me and the rest of the management team.

If your group has questions about the affiliation package or any aspect of PCCN do not hesitate to contact your advisory board member or me directly.

Best regards until my next update.

Bob Shiell

Vice President, Prostate Cancer Canada; Managing Director, PCCN
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*If you would like to have your **story/journey** printed in a future issue, please forward a copy of it, along with a recent photo (optional), to me at gmercer@nl.cancer.ca or write to:*

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