In this issue, we explore the concerns and needs of partners of survivors. Three overarching themes are discussed: 1) coping with life in the face of cancer, 2) encountering difficult emotions related to a partner’s illness, and 3) learning to live with relationship changes.

We look at these at various stages of the prostate cancer “journey”: diagnosis and treatment, and what that experience is like for couples, what they find as helpful, harmful, and surprising throughout the experience, what couples and families need through and following treatment, and how men and women think and respond differently to intimacy and relationship challenges that occur as a result of prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment.

“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.”
– Lao Tzu, philosopher

The content in The Walnut is taken from reputable sources. However, it is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions.
Good Bye to our Walnut Editor

Some years ago, on assuming the position as Chair of the PCCNO Board of Directors, we were confronted with the loss of the editor of the Walnut. This publication had become established as a core piece of PCCNO’s communication to its members. With some advertising Don Briscoe came forward to take on the task. While Don’s resume was impressive, we could not have been more fortunate in having him serve as the Walnut editor and bringing to our membership a wealth of timely information. We have been truly blessed by the depth and breadth of Don’s information pieces. They have gained the admiration and gratitude of all who have followed the Walnut editions.

On a personal level Don has been of immense value to me when I needed his counsel and support on particular initiatives we wanted to take on. Don’s contribution to our 2017 Ottawa conference is a case in point. His steady hand and patient approach are qualities I greatly admire. Don helped with the conference theme and shared contacts that proved valuable.

I am pleased to advise that the Board of Directors decided to present Don with our Black Walnut award which acknowledges the exceptional contribution by an individual or group in advancing the work of prostate cancer awareness and treatment. While Don takes a well-deserved break from the editorial duties, we hope he will not be too far away. His service to PCCNO will be greatly missed.

Larry Peckford
Chair – PCCNO Board of Directors

Goodbye message from the editor

I say goodbye to my role as editor of The Walnut with deepest gratitude for those that I have worked with as well as the PCCNO community in general. Although it is time to move on, I leave with a great deal of enthusiasm for this newsletter and its potential into the future.

Ultimately, the responsibility of an editor is to determine the content, and to set the tone and style for the Walnut.

My editorial approach has been based on “What best serves the readers?” It has been my intention to find and present every article as relevant, readable and valuable for all of our readers.

There are few things that people can relate to more than shared human experience. From day one, I hoped to be able to take aspects of this particular human experience and put them on paper in a way that was informed, mindful, and helpful to all those whose lives have been touched by prostate cancer.

In doing so, I have discovered the challenges of curating a wide variety of information into meaningful articles that provide insights and promote awareness. My hope is that these efforts have been helpful to men with prostate cancer, their families and loved ones.

It is a pleasure to turn over this exciting and challenging role to others. I am sure the Walnut will do well into the future.

~ Don
Spouses/Partners/Family: how to help

Prostate cancer and its treatment can have a significant impact on lifestyle, quality of life and emotional well-being; and it may introduce challenges for expressing sexual intimacy.

The following are some issues that you may encounter and advice on how to handle them as you and your loved one confront the challenges of dealing with prostate cancer.

Communicate
A diagnosis of prostate cancer can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression. Your loved one will need you to be understanding and to listen to his feelings without judgment. Try not to pressure him to talk about his feelings before he is ready. Just knowing that you are there for him when he needs you can make a big difference to his sense of emotional well-being.

Participate
Ask your loved one if he would like you to go with him to his doctor appointments and tests. Men often do not like to discuss their health, and your loved one may benefit from your presence as an advocate who can help voice concerns to the doctor. Also, knowing more about the disease and the treatment options can help with your input into identifying the necessary care and support that’s needed. You can help your loved one to cope with the physical and emotional impact of cancer and its treatment.

Find Support
While trying to cope with the day-to-day physical, emotional and financial challenges that accompany living with prostate cancer, it can be very beneficial for the patient and the spouse/partner/caregiver to talk with others who are having or have had the same experiences. As the Chinese proverb says, “To know the path ahead ask someone coming back.” In Ottawa, the PCCNO provides that kind of support.

Stay Healthy
Remember to take care of yourself as you and your loved one face this challenging time. Staying healthy and emotionally balanced will allow you to provide the kind of support your loved one needs. Get enough sleep, eat well, and exercise, and seek out support from friends and family. Maintain a positive outlook and provide your loved one with a sense of strength and security.

Source: https://www.ustoo.org/Spouses-Partners-Family

UsTOO is a nonprofit established in 1990 providing comprehensive educational materials and resources along with support services that include more than 200 volunteer-led support groups across the U.S. and abroad.
When you and your partner have prostate cancer

While we know how men with prostate cancer are supported by their wives or female partners and the effects this has on their relationships, less is known about how men cope when their male partners are diagnosed, or when they and their partners are diagnosed. In both gay and straight relationships, when one partner has prostate cancer, the other partner will be affected as well. When both partners have been diagnosed, there could be advantages (e.g. one partner’s experience and knowledge can help the other, sharing information) and disadvantages (e.g. both partners dealing with similar stress and distress).

The prostate cancer journey is a personal and unique experience for each man and his circle of care. While many men may be on similar cancer journeys, there are some issues and concerns that affect some men, and some groups of men, more so than others. In this article, we will discuss some of the more common issues that gay men face when diagnosed with prostate cancer.

While there is a large body of research about prostate cancer, there is limited information focused on the experience and needs of gay men. Prostate Cancer Canada discusses some issues particular to gay and bisexual men: http://www.prostatecancer.ca/Prostate-Cancer/Facing-Prostate-Cancer/Gay-and-Bisexual-Men-Prostate-Cancer

Prostate Cancer Canada also provides information about research into the sexual side effects of prostate cancer treatments, and a tool designed to explore how side effects from prostate cancer treatments affect gay and bisexual men’s sex lives:

A lot of gay men don’t have the family support that a lot of straight men have got. A lot of straight men have got wives and children who might say ‘dad’s in trouble, let’s give him some help’. They’ve got a loving family and that’s half of the battle.

Support groups
The support network for gay and bisexual men can be different to that for straight men. Depending on whether they are ‘out’ to their families, and whether their families are supportive, they may not be able to count on them for support. It is common for gay and bisexual men to have ‘surrogate families’ that are made up of friends for mutual support. Some gay and bisexual men have neither their families of origin nor surrogate families for support. If this is your experience, one way to connect with other people is by joining a support group with people who have a similar experience to you. For gay and bisexual men, research shows many positives can come out of getting the appropriate social support – e.g. feeling less anxious in social situations and increased self-esteem.

Research shows that people who join a support group feel:

► a sense of belonging
► a sense of community
► as though they are not alone
► accepted and supported
► empathy
► understood
► as though they are being cared for
► safe to express their feelings and fears.

PCCNO is one of many support groups across Canada, open to all men going through the prostate cancer journey. Canada’s first Prostate Cancer Support Group specifically set up for gay men has been officially launched in Halifax:
http://www.prostatecancer.ca/About-Us/Atlantic-Region/PCC-Atlantic-News/Canada’s-first-Prostate-Cancer-Support-Group-for-g

Source: https://www.prostate.org.au/media/246179/4-wellbeing.pdf
Events

PCCNO BBQ, June 2019

Thank you to Chuck Graham and his son for making the “Plaid for Dad” ribbons!

$264 was raised with a donated amount for one of these ribbons.

The Canadian Cancer Survivor Network (CCSN) held a June 11th breakfast event “WE are emPOWERED to fight cancer”.

Speakers, from the left:
1. Dr Paul Wheatley-Price, Medical Oncologist and President of Lung Cancer Canada
2. Len Webber, Conservative Health Critic and Conservative MP for Calgary Confederation
3. Bill Casey, Chair of Standing Committee on Health (HESA) and Liberal MP for Cumberland-Colchester
4. Elizabeth May, Leader of the GREEN Party and MP for Saanich-Gulf Islands
5. Jackie Manthorne, President and CEO of CCSN
6. Robin Sully, Myeloma Canada
7. Rick Baker, President of the Ottawa Chapter of CARP

Photo, from the left:
Michelle Faber, PCCNO
Bill Casey, Chair of Standing Committee on Health (HESA) and Liberal MP for Cumberland-Colchester
Jackie Manthorne, President and CEO, CCSN

Coping with prostate cancer

“There are only four kinds of people in the world. Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.” —Rosalyn Carter

The Prostate Cancer Treatment Guide is an online, comprehensive resource of prostate cancer information. It is plainly written, and organized conveniently into a chart. The guide is not a substitute for a doctor, but it can be a useful resource for men and their families.

In addition to information about prostate cancer and treatment options, it contains a section on “Coping with Prostate Cancer”.

A Partner’s Perspective

Prostate cancer impacts not only the patient, but also his family, friends and in particular, his spouse or partner. As a caregiver or supporter, you can play an important role in supporting him and helping him navigate important healthcare decisions, difficult emotional challenges and potentially unpleasant side effects.

Many men have trouble speaking about these intimate issues, even with those close to them. Talking openly is an important first step in resolving these important issues. Below are common topics that impact partners who support loved ones with a prostate cancer diagnosis.

Sexual Side Effects & Intimacy
A common concern of men and their significant others following a prostate cancer diagnosis is the potential impact on their relationship. For some men, treatment may lead to sexual side effects, which can impact intimacy between couples.

The first challenge couples face when navigating intimacy issues is that many men simply do not want to talk about them. It is likely that he will be emotionally burdened during this time and may even face depression. Open and honest discussion is recommended, and it may be helpful to find support through friends, family, faith communities, professional counselors or support groups.

Lifestyle Changes
Depending on treatment, some men may experience incontinence – either urinary or bowel dysfunction – as a side effect, particularly from surgery or radiation therapy. While the degree to which men experience incontinence varies, from mild post-surgery issues to long-term difficulties, it can often be embarrassing, stressful and limiting to your loved one’s lifestyle. Understanding his prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment options and speaking openly can help him feel more comfortable discussing these side effects.

Fertility Issues
Certain treatments, despite the best efforts of surgeons or radiologists, almost always lead to infertility – meaning men of any age who undergo these treatments may be unable to naturally conceive children. Surgical procedures remove organs essential to ejaculation of sperm, whereas radiation and chemotherapy can damage semen production and sperm.

If having children is something you might consider following treatment, be sure to discuss infertility concerns with the doctor before choosing a treatment.

Source: https://www.myprostatecancercoach.org/en-US/Families-And-Caregivers/A-Partners-Perspective

Join the Team

For many of us, contributing is part of survival. We learn and find comfort by doing things with other survivors.

Participating in the community helps sustain our quality of life. Your help is needed and you’ll find it rewarding.

Contact us at info@pccnottawa.ca or use the form on the website to introduce yourself and let us know how you’d like to help out. http://pccnottawa.ca/volunteers/join-team

(Photo: unsplash.com)
His Prostate Cancer: Her Struggle Too

A prostate cancer diagnosis can often have effects of sexual impairment, psychosocial issues and financial toxicities for men. But what about its impact on the wives of men with prostate cancer? A recent European study addressed just that.

“Many prostate cancer patients have a hard time, both physically and emotionally, and this work shows that this stress can spill over and affect wives and partners,” professor Hein Van Poppel, European Association for Urology Adjunct Secretary General for Education, said in a press release. “This is good for neither of them. Good mental and emotional health needs to be part of how we judge a treatment, and we need to try to ensure that both patients and their partners get the support they both need.”

Women felt that they could not show emotions of fear or vulnerability in front of their husbands or children.

Danish researchers at Herlev and Gentofte University Hospital questioned 56 women – whose husbands had prostate cancer and were undergoing exercise therapy to maintain body strength and resilience during prostate cancer treatment – to determine the impact their husband’s diagnosis had on their own mental and physical health.

The three women whose husbands had early-stage disease were less stressed and burdened compared with partners of men with advanced stage disease. However, all eight women them reported concerns that, as the disease progressed, their loved ones would develop pain.

Women also reported feelings of social isolation that stemmed from their husbands’ treatment-related fatigue – a common side effect of androgen deprivation therapy – that frequently prevented them from socializing as a couple. As a result, the wives felt cut off from social support.

“They also gradually developed a real fear of being alone, even within the relationship. They felt that they had to be strong, which meant that they couldn’t share the burden of the illness.”

Not to mention, women felt that they could not show emotions of fear or vulnerability in front of their husbands or children. This became increasingly difficult as the wives’ roles changed along with the progression of their spouses’ disease, and their partners were no longer able to take on some of their usual responsibilities.

“How as their men became less able to fulfill their usual roles, the women had to undertake tasks which had previously fallen to the men. Many of these are simple tasks but for the women they represented a sea (of) change in the way their lives were structured.”

These findings point toward the need for health care providers to be more aware of the physical and emotional health of not only their patients, but also their loved ones who are caring for them. The researchers are hoping that their study will pave the way for more research in this area.


How to Involve Your Spouse or Partner in Your Advanced Prostate Cancer Care

As you sort out the tangle of emotions that comes with a diagnosis of advanced prostate cancer, remember that your partner may be feeling much the same way. Learn how you can help each other cope.

One thing is for certain — a cancer diagnosis is a lot to deal with. If you’ve been diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer, you are probably worried about what lies ahead.

As you process your emotions, gather information, and come to terms with your treatment plan, remember one important thing: The diagnosis is not only a shock for you — it’s devastating for your spouse or partner too. That’s when it’s most important that both accept the diagnosis and turn to each other for emotional support. The link below provides information, including the following topics:

Nurturing Your Relationship and Sex Life
Advanced Prostate Cancer Can Affect Your Spouse’s Health Too
How Your Oncologist Can Help

For more information: https://www.everydayhealth.com/hs/living-with-prostate-cancer/involve-your-partner/
Share Your Story

Knowing about other people’s personal experience of prostate cancer can be a source of support and inspiration when you or someone you love is going through cancer treatment.

What is your experience in dealing with prostate cancer? What has this journey been like?

What insights can you share with those about to make, or in the middle of making, important decisions and choices?

If you are the spouse, partner or family member of a prostate cancer patient what experiences can you share to benefit others?

Your stories can support the work of PCCN Ottawa to promote and deliver personal support, education, awareness and health advocacy on behalf of all men and their families that are affected by prostate cancer.

In Memoriam

CRUICKSHANK, Les

PCCNO member since 2004. Suddenly at home in Morrisburg on Monday, October 22, 2018, age 88. Founder of Cruickshank Construction Ltd. Loving husband of Marlene Cruickshank (nee Hanes) for almost 62 years. Loving father of Laurie McElheran (Art) of Iroquois, Steve of Kingston and Lynn Cruickshank (Ray Bryer) of Stouffville.

SICARD, Jean

Jean passed away peacefully on January 9, 2019 at the age of 83. For 40 years, he was the proud owner of Expert Window Cleaning. We will remember him as a man who was motivated and worked hard, a loving father, a caring husband, and an adored “pépé”.

In the Next Issue

Winter 2020 Screening and early detection: why are men reluctant?

Screening is the most common method for early detection of prostate cancer. We all know that if you catch cancer early you are more likely to survive.

Yet not all men are proactive in making sure to seek early detection through screening.

In this issue, we explore some of the factors, such as lack of awareness, beliefs and attitudes that can discourage men’s involvement in prostate cancer screening and early detection activities.

We also explore the pros and cons of screening and look at some best practices.