

Michel LeBel

I am 65 years young. Divorced.

I am in good health and I lead an active personal and professional life.

I work as a financial executive on Bay Street and I also act as a corporate director for public companies. In addition I do volunteer work in my field.

I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in November 2007.

It was not a total surprise. Perhaps, I was in some state of denial until I was actually diagnosed. You always hope it's not going to be you.

Then the reaction: Oh my God!

I GOT THE "BIG C"! This is serious!

Before we talk about treatment, let me tell you about my personal medical history:

I have a good personal doctor.

I have been taking a PSA test along with other tests every year since age 50.

I take good care of my person; I eat well, exercise regularly at my health club, I do not smoke, I do not drink alcohol.

Some will say; "What's the point?"

Well there is a point!

I was feeling really well and I was ready to fight this disease. I took it on with full energy, confidence and with a positive attitude. Being healthy is everything.

3 years ago PSA test started to rise and so to speak got to show on the proverbial “radar”

I was referred to and started to be followed by a specialist:

Initials tests: including digital, biopsy and ultra sound showed no traces of cancer.

I then started regular quarterly visits to the specialist and took semi annual PSA tests. The PSA tests were stable until October 2007 when it rose sharply to 6.4.

The doctor did a digital test and it looked OK but he sent me to have another biopsy done.

The biopsy showed cancer traces;

My Gleason count was 8.

Clinical stage was T2a; meaning a small contamination in one half of the gland.

The elevated Gleason test indicated a potentially higher risk level;

The subsequent series of 3 tests that are normally prescribed after diagnostic showed no traces of cancer outside prostate gland.

I decided to fast tract treatment and chose to go to Sunnybrook as my hospital of choice. I live nearby.

My choice was also based on the general reputation of the hospital and that of the Odette Cancer Centre. Interestingly, at the time, I did not know too much about the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Now the treatment phase begins;

During the first week of December I met with an oncologist at Sunnybrook, Dr. Gillian Thomas, to determine treatment plan.

My PSA test had risen to 7.1 by then.

Dr. Thomas prescribed 39 external radiation treatments over a period of 8-9 weeks combined with hormonal treatment over a 2 year period.

Radiation is a proven form of treatment. It has the advantage of being able to deal with cancer cells outside the gland that may not be visible during surgery. However, it does affect a good deal of healthy cells.

The hormonal treatment will prevent cancer cells from regenerating because it stops the testicles from producing the enzymes that can encourage the pro-creation of cancers cells. It is a form of chemical castration. This is a bit scary!

The side effects during treatment are manageable and I was able to maintain a normal work schedule and a good social life.

The long term effects can be significant as far as sexual functions are concerned. I based my decision on the health outcome and accepted the sexual function risks.

I agreed to go ahead immediately with both forms of treatments.

The doctor's recommendation was well explained and was consistent with my research and other advice received. It was also in line with my preference for a non-invasive form of treatment because I am essentially self-employed and my personal life is quite active.

Radiation treatments started just before Christmas and were completed by the middle of February.

I am blessed with a strong will and a naturally good attitude. I got plenty of support from my family and my closest friends.

I experienced no major side effects, I consider that treatments were not difficult and presented no significant personal or professional inconvenience.

I was extremely well treated by the medical staff at all levels at Sunnybrook's Odette Cancer Centre. My treatment schedule was arranged to accommodate my work days, and also the few times when we went to the Symphony or to the Opera.

Today, I consider that I lead a normal life.

I am being followed by Dr. Thomas, an urologist, and the psychiatric section at the Cancer Centre.

I decided by choice to share the fact that I had cancer only with my close family and my closest friends.

On a professional basis, I shared this strictly on a need to know basis as my work was really not affected by my treatment schedule.

So in the eyes of most people who know me; nothing happened. That's the way I want it.

Health management tips:

Listen to your doctor.

Take your PSA tests annually. Tell you sons, sons-in-law and nephews to do it too.

Be well informed about you health in general and Prostate Cancer in particular as soon as your PSA test “gets on the radar”.

Remember that early detection means survival and a normal life.

Trust your doctors, have a positive attitude.

Man to Man:

There is a lot of support available to help you go through this “high intensity” personal health event. Outside family, friends and doctors, Man to Man is the best source of support and information.

Good people and tons of valuable information.

The last word:

We are lucky to live in Toronto where we have state of the art treatment available and in Canada where there is no cost to the patient even for expensive procedures such as cancer treatment.

Do you know that Canada boasts the best cancer survival record in the world?

I hope this was useful to some of you.

Thank you for listening.