

Commentary...

Cancer and me: The reality

By Jim Williams
Correspondent

After the shock and sadness of getting another cancer diagnosis, comes the fun part. Once the biopsy is back, it's time to get staged and have the oncologists come up with your treatment plan.

The treatment plan for my type of cancer is considered the "gold standard." Twenty-eight days of radiation, with one week of chemotherapy at the first week, and another week on the final full week of radiation.

When they decide upon your treatment, they go over some of the issues you may deal with. Fatigue, sickness, hair loss, bone brittleness, and a host of others. What they fail to tell you is the amount of pain you will be dealing with, the extent of the fatigue, and considering they are 'nuking' your lower pelvis, what other issues may come up.

The reality was, that my bladder decided to be hyperactive and I had to "go" virtually every 45 minutes for several weeks. This included the nights, which of course made it difficult to sleep. That calmed down after a while and my function is pretty much back to normal.

The reality now is, that having your anus radiated causes all sorts of problems. In my case, I had been radiated down there about 19

years ago. A much lighter dose of radiation than I received this time, but enough cumulatively, that my function there leaves a lot to be desired. When my large colon was removed 14 years ago, the surgeon said that it was the goal to get me down to 10-12 bowel movements a day! Whoa!

Somehow I managed, and my body adapted and that became more like 6-7 times a day. I was still able to have a fairly normal life. I could ride my bike 5-6 hours at a time. There was some preparation involved in making that happen, and there was the occasional hike that left me taking care of business in the woods without anything to cleanup but a pair of socks (not recommended) or pine needles, ouch! But all in all, things were good.

Things are not so good now. I'm over and above the 10-12 times a day the doctors first thought years ago. I can't seem to empty completely. Because of the radiation and reduced blood flow, things just don't quite work like they're supposed to. I'm in a lot of pain due to frequency and a lack of, uh, flexibility in the area. It hurts to go. I can't hardly walk as I also have urgency issues. Even if I've just gone, there is a feeling that there's always more, and sometimes there is. Between the pain, urgency and frequency, I'm able to work, as

long as I'm close to a bathroom. Venturing far from home to go to a movie, or dinner though, is out of the question.

I've found a message board for anal cancer survivors and apparently I am not alone with this reality. It is quite common, and for some it has gotten better; for others, it is now something they have to live with every day. I can say that mine has improved somewhat in the 12 weeks since my treatment, and I'm hoping of course that I continue to improve so I can have some semblance of a normal life.

I am not alone in this. People with other cancers deal with their own reality. I know of an 80-year-old gentleman who was cured of Stage 4 throat cancer, which is awesome and amazing. The problem is, his epiglottis (the flap that keeps food from going into your lungs) is fried. After a couple of trips to the hospital from choking and acquiring pneumonia, he has been given a feeding tube. Some reality. Cured, but can probably never eat again.

Many others thrive after treatment, even with this new reality. I hope, after it's been determined that my treatments have worked and the cancer is gone, that I am one of those. At the moment, I am not. There's a lot more I could write, but I have to "go," right now.

Be 'two-weeks ready'

It occurred 317 years ago and while there's no way to know when the next Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake might hit, it's a good idea to be prepared.

Many people in the Pacific Northwest have been aware of the Cascadia Subduction Zone, but a *New Yorker* article by Kathryn Schulz in July 2015 drew national attention to the 600-mile fault that runs from northern California to British Columbia, about 70-100 miles off the Pacific coast shoreline. The last Cascadia quake occurred in this fault on January 26, 1700, with an estimated 9.0 magnitude. Currently, scientists predict that there is about a 40 percent chance that a megathrust earthquake of 9.0+ magnitude in this fault zone will occur in the next 50 years.

Schulz's article, and surrounding media attention about Cascadia, generated awareness and created some fear. But Althea Rizzo, geologic hazards program coordinator for Oregon's Office of Emergency Management, says that fear is often based on the unknown. Knowing what to do, and how to be prepared for a large-scale earthquake, or any disaster, can help to mitigate fear and empower people to take action. That action, says Rizzo, includes putting

together a plan and emergency kits to be 2 Weeks Ready.

And preparation for "the Big One" leaves you in good shape to weather other emergencies — such as those created by severe weather. Power outages during extreme cold, being snowed in at your home — if you're prepared these things can be handled with relative ease and comfort, and peace of mind.

According to Rizzo, people are more prepared than they think.

"You probably already have many of the things you need, such as flashlights and leather gloves," says Rizzo. "Pick up a couple items every payday and check out garage sales and thrift stores for tools and gear. Look in the garage, closets and junk drawer for items before adding to your shopping list. Being prepared to be self-sufficient for two weeks is an achievable goal. You can get there over time."

(See related story on page 11 for ideas on how to prepare.)

Oregon Office of Emergency Management has many tools and resources to be prepared for a Cascadia quake and other disasters. Check out their new website at www.oregon.gov/OEM.

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