

Commentary...

Cancer and me: I ain't dead yet

By Jim Williams
Columnist

Just in case any of you were wondering, yes, I am still here. There have been many times since the last installment of this series that I wished that I wasn't still here, but here I am.

I started immunotherapy back in the fall of last year. Keytruda is the latest cocktail they have decided to treat me with. Now, Keytruda itself doesn't do anything to attack or treat the cancer. Keytruda works with your body's own immune system so that your immune system can go after the cancer. Keytruda is not for everyone. It only works in people with certain types of cancers and certain genetic markers. It's all very complicated. All I know for sure is that I was a candidate for its use, and that it is very slow-acting.

Most people who are on Keytruda get treated every three weeks. It is so much easier than being treated with chemo and radiation therapy. It's not without its side effects though, but there are fewer of them, and they are not as harsh. Unfortunately, fatigue is one of them. Add to the fact that I have not recovered from my previous, "conventional" treatments, the fatigue can border on debilitating. Our bodies really aren't designed for cancer treatment. They most certainly are not designed to go through it three times. The other side effects I deal with are an accumulation of discomfort brought on by these previous treatments. Some things are getting better, others are not.

Brain fog, neuropathy, edema, fatigue, balance issues and anxiety are but

just a few of the joys I deal with daily. Now, there are some positives here. Since I wrote last, I have been able to drive my car. Previously, the pain meds I was taking kept me from being able to drive. We have reduced my pain meds substantially since then so I can now get out of the house on my own and see the world. I can also walk better than before. My stamina and balance has improved immensely, but I still have a long way to go. If you see a guy walking around town with cross-country ski polls to help with his balance, that would probably be me. As frustrating as this is, the doctors are quite encouraged with my progress. I've been so inactive the last year-and-a-half, that I have started to wither away. I have little to no muscle tone, and until recently, very little stamina. These are things that the doctors are confident will get better, but will require much work on my part.

Many things about my recovery frustrate me. Introducing anxiety into the mix is not something I needed or anticipated, but I think the worst thing is just not feeling like myself anymore. I'm so tired that I don't feel like doing anything. Things that I can still do require a great deal of effort. I should have written a follow-up column months ago, but here I am just now getting around to it. My guitars are collecting dust, as well as my brain. I went back and read some of the cancer series columns. They are not my best work. I used to write for *The Nugget* quite frequently during the recession, when I was out of work. Those are much better samples of what I used to be able to do.

With work, I hope to return to some semblance of that writer, not this one, who can barely put a coherent thought together.

Now all of this may really sound like a downer, and obviously, in many cases it is. But the good news is: I wouldn't be writing this if something along the way hadn't happened. About five weeks ago my doctor ordered a CT scan to see what was going on with the tumors in my back. Previous blood work was still showing pretty high numbers of a marker used for cancer detection. These numbers are not an end all be all, but he was getting concerned that they weren't dropping. Well, when we got the results back from the CT, it showed that the larger of what appears to be just two tumors shrank over 20 percent.

The Keytruda was working.

One scan does not start a trend, but generally once treatment starts getting numbers moving in a certain direction, that's the direction doctors expect them to go. It appears that with continued shrinkage, the tumors will eventually go away, and I will be in remission. This is not a cure, and I may have to take Keytruda forever, but this should at least keep things at bay for a while, and allow me to continue to heal.

Down the road, I still have some obstacles to overcome, and possible decisions to make concerning my side-effects, but all in all things are looking much better. Now it is possible that things could go to hell by the time of the next scan, but every indication is that it will not.

I ain't dead yet.

Quilting for scouts...



PHOTO PROVIDED

Sisters Girl Scout Troop 10732 is raising funds in support of Sisters Cold Weather Shelter by raffling a quilt made by Dera Rosdahl (shown with Lance Trowbridge). The 58-by-60-inch quilt is on display at Rainwater Café, where tickets are available: \$1 each or six for \$5. The raffle drawing will be Wednesday, March 7 at Sisters American Legion meeting at Sisters City Hall.

Ore. governor pushes agenda for 2018 legislative session

SALEM (AP) — Boosting affordable housing and job growth in rural Oregon, tightening gun control and battling the opioid epidemic are among Gov. Kate Brown's priorities in the upcoming legislative session.

Brown's policy advisers described the bills Brown would support in a briefing with reporters Wednesday.

They include assisting those in the construction industry in starting their own business by making it easier for skilled professionals to get supervisory licenses by temporarily waiving fees and allowing job experience as education requirements.

She also wants to reduce the state's public pension liability.

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on this week's inserts in the Nugget:

Ray's Food Place: This week's *Fantastic Friday One-day Deal*, January 19 only, is a favorite for winter citrus: two-pound bags of **Halo Clementine Tangerines** are just **\$1.99 each** (for the first four; additional bags are \$4.99 each)!

Bi-Mart: Is the old vacuum ready to retire? Bi-Mart is now offering its **Hoover High-capacity Bagless Upright Vacuum** at **20% Off!** Regularly priced at \$99.99, you can pick one up now for **\$79.99!**

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