Chuck Strand: Anxiety, Depression + Prostate Cancer

Mr. Chuck Strand is the CEO of Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education and Support Network (http://www.ustoo.org/). He discusses the anxiety and depression often associated with prostate cancer.

A cancer diagnosis of any type triggers a wide range of initial reactions and emotions. While in some instances it might provide a sense of resolution, a more typical response may include sadness, loss, fear, guilt, stigmatization, embarrassment, anger, or disappointment.

Many aspects of living with a prostate cancer diagnosis can be sources of anxiety and depression—everything from anticipating the next PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood test results to dealing with the post-treatment impact of common side effects like incontinence and erectile dysfunction (ED).

Unfortunately, men and their partners are not always fully informed about the likelihood of these side effects. Some men may not realize how much these issues can affect their quality of life. It is important for a man to recognize that once diagnosed with prostate cancer, the disease will unfortunately be a perpetual issue of concern and a potential source of anxiety due to ongoing monitoring of PSA test results at a minimum, regardless of the course of action he takes. While active surveillance can be emotionally exhausting, over-treatment can result in decreased quality of life with ED, incontinence, and the potential emotional and psychological impact of having second thoughts about his treatment choice.

Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression not only affect the quality of a man’s life, but can also keep the body’s immune system from functioning at its full capacity. Additionally, it can have a negative impact on adherence to treatment regimens. Therefore, it’s important to recognize these conditions and attempt to address them accordingly.

Anxiety is a feeling of nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worrying—typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Symptoms include: feelings of fear or anxiety, sweating (for no reason), chest pains, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, or inability to rest.

Depression is a feeling of severe despondency and dejection. Symptoms include: sleeping more or less (as compared with regular sleeping habits), loss of interest in daily activities, an unusual increase or decrease in energy, changes in appetite (eating either more or less as compared with regular eating habits), increased irritability or impatience, or difficulty concentrating.

Action Items to Help

Take action rather than passively accepting anxiety and depression as a given. Begin by acknowledging the very real relationship between anxiety, depression, and prostate cancer. Take stock of your own emotions. Talk to your doctor about your concerns. Make sure your diet is heart-healthy/prostate-healthy. Exercise even if you do not feel like it. Especially if you do not feel like it! Exercise releases endorphins and neurotransmitters that promote relaxation and eliminate excess cortisol, a hormone released during stress and associated with anxiety. Get mindful and try to incorporate yoga, meditation, acupuncture, or other holistic practices into your life. These lift the body, mind, and spirit. Try to keep a positive attitude when possible, but understand that ups and downs are normal and expected during prostate cancer treatment.

If appropriate, your doctor might be able to provide a referral to a counselor who can help. Some common techniques to effectively manage anxiety include talk therapy (especially Cognitive Behavioral Therapy [CBT]) and anti-anxiety medications. Depression can be managed though lifestyle changes to establish more connections and support, psychotherapy (including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), pharmacological treatment and, in advanced situations, Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT).

Reach Out!

If you are dealing with prostate cancer and experiencing anxiety and/or depression, know that you’re not alone. Educational resources and support services are available to help cope with anxiety and/or depression.

Many men with prostate cancer and their wives/partners have dealt with anxiety and depression. It can be helpful to attend an Us TOO prostate cancer support group to share experiences and gather information and support from those who have successfully managed these challenges.

To find an Us TOO prostate cancer support group near you, visit www.ustoo.org/Support-Group-Near-You, call 800-808-7866, or email ustoo@ustoo.org.

To join a prostate cancer support group via telephone, visit www.ancan.org/support-calls.

For individual counseling on anxiety or depression by telephone and online group counseling, contact CancerCare at 800-813-4673 or www.cancercare.org.

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