



Interview Transcript: Doug

Doug works in business development for a large software company. He is married and has two children.

Type of Cancer: Prostate cancer with bone metastasis

Age at Diagnosis: 49

Year of Diagnosis: 2001

Treatment: Salvage Radiation Therapy (after reoccurrence)

Date of Interview: July 2009

My name is Doug Gosling and I'm 56 years old. I was diagnosed over seven years ago with prostate cancer, which I treated and which recurred about two years ago. And I'm currently basically managing the side effects of the pain from my cancer, which has metastasized. So really at this point in time I'm not treating the cancer, I'm only treating the pain and we're waiting to see what happens. And I will have to make a decision at the appropriate time as to whether I want to go into clinical trials of new drugs because there really isn't anything out there.

Managing pain

One of the things about having cancer people don't really understand, and certainly I didn't appreciate until I had it, it's not just the cancer itself. The cancer can get into your organs, get into your bones or whatever and eventually may kill you, but it's often the treatment that causes most of the problem. So I could say that I'm for the most part effectively managing my pain. Well, that's taking a lot of morphine and a lot of additional drugs that I have to take to do this. It keeps it under control for the most part. But it's a good example, this lovely pony chair that I'm sitting in, I bought this chair because I cannot sit in my own living room furniture anymore. It's too soft. No matter how much morphine I'm on and how much it's under control, if I sat in my couch for more than 10 or 15 minutes the pain would get very, very intense, and so I had to buy this special chair and this is really the only chair that I can sit in for any length of time now.

Finding support

I realized over time, I think—and I've seen a lot of doctors—that doctors know a lot about things but they don't know everything, and nobody is better equipped to really focus on you but yourself. I really took to the Internet to do research on this disease and the treatments and all the numbers and what was happening inside my body that I couldn't see. And I... you could find some of that in books but over the Internet too I managed to connect with groups of people, like Google groups, where they would all talk about prostate cancer and I found that to be very useful.

I really didn't get a lot of benefit from support groups. There are prostate cancer support groups around but because prostate cancer is typically an older man's disease, these were basically a

bunch of very wellmeaning great guys that were retired and had lots of time to spend at this. And I was in a situation where I had family, I was working, I had a mortgage, I was in a whole different world. So I really found my support network, aside from my family and friends, on the Internet by asking questions and reading what other people had asked and I found that extremely useful.

Accepting your limits

It's very easy for people to just close the doors and pull down the blinds and stay inside and curl up and wait for the worst to happen. Because it seems so big and so huge, and cancer really is a huge, huge thing. They talk about the big C and I really understand what that means. But you get to a point, and I've got to that point, where first of all I have to accept the fact that I'm limited, physically. It's almost like admitting to yourself that you have a disability.

I find it very difficult because of the pain and because of the drugs, I can't do what I used to. I can't really do the work around the house as much as I used to. I can't do a lot of things that I could. And I find that very, very difficult. I'm somebody who likes to be busy and likes to do everything, whether it's a little bit of plumbing or electrical work or something, and I just can't do that anymore. I have to rely a lot more on my wife and my friends to do things for me and it's a major change. That's as difficult as anything, any part of this cancer experience.

Sharing the news

One of the things about having cancer is, how do you tell people, how do you tell your family and your friends, and what do you do about work—do you tell them? When I was first diagnosed, I told everybody, most of it really in consultation with my wife, Diane. I experienced a lot of different reactions. Some people just don't know what to say, some people will not talk to you anymore, some people will be all over trying to help you, some people will look at you like you're already dead. It's really quite amazing. You do kind of learn that. Not everybody views it the same way. Even some friends and family members don't know what to say so they stop calling.

So that's always a shock and it's difficult to deal with that. You can talk to a lot of people when you're diagnosed with cancer. When you have a recurrence, it's interesting; it's much more difficult to talk to people. And I think I was shying away from it. People would call and say, "How're you doing?" And I'd say, "Fine." And Diane really helped me through that and she said, "These are your friends and your family. They love you and they care for you and they need to know. They want to help and so you should be open and honest with them." And that was really hard for me but I did do it. Sometimes I feel like I'm complaining. Diane says I'm not a complainer but I feel like that sometimes. But I have found that my really close friends have really stepped up and the really close family members have really stepped up, and in fact have developed some strong relationships that didn't exist before because of this.

Carrying on

I appreciate it at work that I don't look sick because then again I can interact with people sort of normally. But I do sit there sometimes in meetings saying, "They're probably looking at me thinking I'm wide awake and fine but my God my back hurts, I feel like I'm going to throw up and I really want to go home." I'm thinking this in the back of my mind. It's difficult; it's very, very stressful at times. That stress of working.

Fighting cancer is a fulltime job and I have a fulltime job as well and it's very, very difficult. Just pretending that I'm feeling fine when I'm not is exhausting and I find that it's sort of a switch that turns on when it needs to. I perform, I guess, but as soon as I walk in, my wife says this is my safe place. I let it all hang out. It's very hard on her. I understand that. I feel horribly bad about it and I apologize for it but Diane will say, "It's not your fault. It's the cancer and it's doing it to both of us." So she carries... she doesn't have the disease but she's as effected just as much in many, many ways.

The truth of it

One of the things you hear about sometimes with people who have been diagnosed with cancer is, they'll say, "It's the best thing that ever happened to me," and you go, "How can that possibly be?" And what that's really about is that it's opened their eyes, and certainly for me it opened my eyes. I mean I was living a life with no sense of my mortality, or really not a very good sense of perspective about life and the future and old age and what could happen, and I really wasn't physically taking care of myself as well.

I started taking better care of myself. I developed a much better appreciation for personal relationships. I developed a much better understanding of my emotional wellbeing or lack thereof at times and how I needed to handle that. And I think I became a better person for that. So I can look back and say that that was a good thing that came out of it. Unfortunately when you have a recurrence and as I am now, being incurable, it's really hard to find anything good in that, frankly. It does make you think seriously about what you do in the next few years, for example, and your time horizon becomes much shorter, but those are all just coping things. I wouldn't say they're anything I would wish on anybody.