“Mr. 80 Percent” Raises the Curtain on Prostate Cancer

A new podcast explores what it’s really like to have this common disease.

October 9, 2020 By Caroline Tien

Boston Globe reporter Mark Shanahan is best known for his daily column on entertainment and pop culture. Now, however, he’s dipping a toe into digital media with his new podcast, Mr. 80 Percent. In six half-hour episodes, it tells the harrowing tale of how he was diagnosed with, treated for and survived prostate cancer.

One reason Shanahan developed the podcast was to raise awareness of prostate cancer, which he calls an “absurdly common disease.” One man in nine will develop prostate cancer in his lifetime, including about 200,000 a year in the United States alone. “Doctors like to say that most men will either die with prostate cancer or from it,” Shanahan said in a recent interview with Anthony Brooks and Martin Kessler of the Boston public radio station WBUR.

Shanahan was 48 in 2013 when routine blood work revealed elevated levels of the protein prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in his bloodstream, a possible indicator of increased risk for prostate cancer. A subsequent biopsy confirmed his worst fears: Like his father before him, he had prostate cancer.

Desperate to preserve his sexual function, Shanahan hoped a prostatectomy, the surgical removal of all or most of the prostate, would put an end to his ordeal. But much to his chagrin, it wasn’t entirely successful. To eradicate the remaining cancer cells, he endured a round of hormone therapy followed by a round of radiation therapy, an experience that evoked the idiom “the cure is worse than the disease.”

“I became a different person,” he told WBUR of his time on the testosterone blocker Lupron. “I had, you know—the euphemism is mood swings. I didn’t have mood swings; I had tantrums.”

Mr. 80 Percent, which premiered on September 24, combines narration with interviews with Shanahan’s oncologists, friends and relatives to paint a picture of what it’s like to confront your own mortality in middle age. The podcast is “part memoir, part journalistic investigation,” according to a review on the website Podknife. Shanahan touches upon topics as diverse as his personal experiences with prostate cancer, the history of prostate cancer treatment and cultural conceptions of masculinity.

The first five episodes of Mr. 80 Percent are available to stream on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other services.

To read about one way to lower your risk of prostate cancer, click here. And to read about racial disparities in prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment, click here and here. See also "What Are the Long-Term Side Effects of Prostate Cancer Treatment?"

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/podcast-raises-curtain-prostate-cancer