Tom Brokaw Gets Candid About How Privilege Helped With Cancer Costs

He believes that America has the resources to make drugs and treatment more affordable for everyone.

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In 2013, legendary NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw was diagnosed with incurable multiple myeloma, an uncommon type of blood cancer that affects the bone marrow. Now, he's reflecting on his experience and how privilege aided in his treatment, PEOPLE reports.

Following his diagnosis, Brokaw immediately reached out to the Mayo Clinic. The hospital ranked number one in the United States by the U.S. News and World Report quickly made accommodations for the 80-year-old, including sending a plane to pick him up.

He started treatment at the hospital, and in December 2014, he announced that he was in remission.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people who get involved in this kind of situation don't have those opportunities," Brokaw recently told SurvivorNet in an interview. "I'm keenly aware of that."

According to Brokaw, although great progress has been made with regard to cancer drugs and treatment, more work remains to be done when it comes to cost.

Brokaw recalls spending up to $10,000 per week on drugs. But he notes how the privilege of having excellent insurance has allowed him to write smaller checks to pay for his costs, which makes him think often about what people without such benefits go through.

Here's a look at the facts. According to the President's Cancer Panel, an independent panel established under the National Cancer Act of 1971, the ongoing and rapid increase in cancer drug costs are jeopardizing the health and lives of people with cancer. Prices have risen so steeply that they're quickly outpacing growth in household incomes. In 1995, for example, people living with cancer and their insurers shelled out $54,100 for a year of life compared with $207,000 in 2013.

"We have the greatest resources in the world," Brokaw said. "Let's figure out how we can make it cost effective, how we can have a true testing program for efficiency and results, and that people will have access to those results."

These days, Brokaw is still experiencing back pain and uses medical marijuana to ease his symptoms. (Research has shown that many older adults approve of using cannabis for medical use if recommended by a doctor.) He says medical marijuana laws in Florida are complex, but he's figuring them out.

He has also been relying on the current state of politics to distract him from dwelling on his cancer.

"In less than a year, I'll be 80 years old," he said. "I'm finding that hard to believe quite honestly. And I think even without cancer, turning 80 might have been a little more tricky than I thought it was going to be."

Click here to how Americans aren't taking meds as prescribed to reduce cost.

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