Day 2,663 — Research-Induced Stress

February 24, 2018 By Dan Zeller

Finally! I'm so glad this past week is over. It was emotionally one of the roughest weeks I've had in a long time.

It all started last weekend, which was a three day holiday weekend for those of us here in the U.S. Because I want to be as prepared as possible going into my April appointment with my doctor, I spent two of the three days continuing to research all sorts of things that will help me have a better informed discussion.

I posted a question in an online support group under the heading, "Recurrent Prostate Cancer and Salvage Radiation Therapy." What followed were some very thoughtful sharing of stories from other patients who had been down that path already. But there was also a very robust discussion between a retired physician, himself a prostate cancer patient, and a long-time prostate cancer patient advocate. Both had some great insights—sometimes conflicting—and both connected me to other resources.

I'll spare the full-blown details, but what stressed me out last weekend—and lasted well into the week—was the notion that, despite the plethora of information out there about recurrent prostate cancer and treatment options, too much of it is conflicting or inconclusive, and there's no clear answer for me.

When you know that you're going to have to make a decision that could impact the length of your life and the quality of your time remaining, not having clear choices is a problem. And once you choose your path, there may be no going back. You may have to live with permanent, life-altering side effects as a result of that choice. The risks may be low, but they're real.

Cancer, treatment options, side effects, and imaging technologies were pretty much all that I thought about all week long, and it took its toll emotionally and physically. I couldn't shake the thoughts from my head, no matter how hard I tried. In my role as a volunteer manager, I really needed to be as upbeat and positive as I can. I tried my best last week, but it was exhausting doing so.

I know that much of this stress is self-inflicted. If I'd just step away from Google and stop researching, then this may not be so bad. But that's not how I'm wired. I will say, however, if my doctor's appointment was tomorrow, I'd feel pretty comfortable going into it with the knowledge that I've amassed so far.

I also know that there are no guarantees no matter which path I choose. I just want to choose wisely.

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