A Look Back on 2018

New year, same me: reflecting on the past year of testicular cancer awareness work and setting goals for 2019

January 7, 2019 By Justin Birckbichler

Generally speaking, I try to avoid writing reflective posts that have no actionable takeaways. However, I feel like after being in 2019 for a week, it's a good time to reflect back on 2018, while also looking forward to the upcoming year.

Those 365 days made up quite a momentous year, both in my awareness/advocacy work and in my own continued personal healing. Since this is a recap of a bunch of articles I've already written, I'll be presenting this post in a 'Listicle' format, so feel free to click to the links to read the whole post.

Although, a more appropriate term might be a… Test-icle.

2018 was my busiest year yet on the testicular cancer awareness and advocacy front

- In late March, I launched the Band of Ballers series, highlighting other advocates for their efforts in raising awareness in testicular cancer. In the months since then, I've had the privilege of sharing eleven different stories of some incredible people, with more to come.

- Throughout April (testicular cancer awareness month) and June (men's health awareness month), I surveyed over 500 men to discover what really happens with testicular exams and discussions about self-exam at the doctor's office. I've left the survey open since then and accumulated nearly 700 responses. Now, the statistics stand at saying on that only 46% of the men had their testicles examined at their last physical (down from 51% originally), and 80% were not told how to do a self-exam (as opposed to 78% previously).

- In April, I was able to attend the HealtheVoices conference through Janssen Pharmaceuticals. The connections I made there have continued to flourish to this day and I hope to be there

again this year!

- One of my most shining moments was winning WEGO Health Award for Hilarious Patient Leader in October. Somehow, I've managed to trick many people into thinking that endless ball puns is worthy of recognition. Earlier in the year, ABSOT was also recognized as the Best Cancer Awareness and Advocacy Blog by I Had Cancer.

- In order to bring my message to wider audiences, I relentlessly pursued opportunities and partnerships outside the cancer space. These numerous emails, phone calls, DMs, and more ended up resulting in articles in British GQ, Livestrong, the Mayo Clinic, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and more.

- The achievement I am most proud of it the completion of a PSA about testicular cancer for high school health classes that I produced in conjunction with the Department of Education. This was a long-lasting project and I could not be happier with the outcome.

Beyond my testicular cancer awareness efforts, I had many special moments in my personal cancer journey

- In June and December, I received two good follow-up scans — no active cancer in my body! This is definitely a major plus. In 2019, I'll only have bloodwork and won't have a scan until December (or possibly January 2020)!

- I spent the majority of the first half of the year taking care of my mental health, through a combination of antidepressants, regular exercise, and writing. Although I never got back around to resuming therapy, it's always on my radar as an option if I feel the need.

- At my December scan, it was also found that my Vitamin D was low, which can also contribute to mood swings and memory issues. I'm now on a supplement that is supposed to help, and it

feels like it might be helping.

- I opened up a lot about what it means to live life after a cancer diagnosis, including regular posts on Cure Voices and working with Bristol-Myers Squibb to share my perspective in their Life with Cancer video series that aims to help raise awareness of life after diagnosis by sharing the stories of patients and those who support them.

Looking towards 2019 in the testicular cancer awareness space

- To be honest, I don't have many "big goals" for 2019. I want to continue doing what I am doing and help improve on the work I've already done.

- In late 2018, I became a weekly columnist for the Good Men Project and a brand ambassador for Zeus Beard. These two additional roles are vital pieces of the puzzle as we move into 2019, as it helps me reach my "target market" with more regularity and ease. Both organizations have been so welcoming and understanding of my goals and I am excited to see what these opportunities hold.

- In another new role at the latter half of 2018, I joined the Board of Directors for the Crush it for Curtis Foundation. Now in 2019, my 'title' is officially Director of Men's Health Programs, and will be more solidified as the organization begins to get more involved in the men's health space.

- The results from the aforementioned survey still are bothering me. A self-exam saved my life and I find it ridiculous that it's not a common occurrence and talking point in physical exams. A big reason for this may be that the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends against them for a variety of reasons, including "unnecessary testing." However, if a testicular lump is detected, a scrotal ultrasound is done, which does not have any harmful side effects. The USPSTF also used to recommend against both mammograms and prostate PSA tests, but they

were overturned. There are a variety of advocates working to do the same for testicular examinations, and I want to help join this force.

- Finally, I am going to be focusing on getting the PSA into high schools, starting with the school district I currently work in. While the production of the video is awesome in and of itself, it’s not serving its primary purpose of educating high school students by just sitting on YouTube.

The ball may have dropped on New Years Eve, but I’ve only begun to crack the nut on my testicular cancer mission.

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