The “Natural” Way

Was chemotherapy the best option for testicular cancer? I thought so, but wanted to confirm it. (Spoiler — it is.)

February 2, 2017 By Justin Birckbichler

After finding out my official diagnosis, staging, and prognosis on Monday, I decided on Tuesday that I had to share with a wider audience, beginning with my Instagram friends, who are all friends from high school and college. I felt that guys are always told to do self-exams (click here to learn how), but who really follows that advice? Putting my name to testicular cancer would make it more concrete for people. Someone they knew actually had it. Activism is the one thing I do have control over right now.

To make sure I had all the facts about chemotherapy to include in these various posts, I decided to do a quick Google search about the side effects and risks involved with it. I was shocked to see how many websites came up about skipping chemotherapy entirely and going on a more “natural route.”

I want to be clear. I am not 100% against homeopathic medicine.

In college, anytime I got sick, I would turn to oranges as my main form of treating it, which is more evidence of my disdain for visiting a doctor. I read numerous studies that scientifically proved that my citrus obsession was ineffective, but I thought it worked for me.

However, treating cancer is an entirely different beast than a simple sore throat. After my initial shock had subsided, I was curious to see if there was any merit to these claims. A more in-depth Google search shows that some people do turn to homeopathic remedies to deal with cancer. A famous example was Steve Jobs. He passed away from pancreatic cancer, after having used homeopathic remedies to treat his cancer for nearly nine months after receiving his diagnosis before turning to more traditional medical approaches. He elected to use this approach as opposed to undergoing surgery to remove his cancerous mass. There are many anecdotal stories of the miraculous recoveries that some people have made because of homeopathic remedies. But the likelihood that this tactic will actually result in a full recovery is slim. In Jobs’s case, he ended up regretting losing those nine months where he explored other options. During that time, his cancer spread, and it became inoperable. His biographer, Walter Isaacson, says that, near the end of his life, he and Jobs had many conversations about this regret.

I am a logical man. If given a variety of options when it comes to staying alive, I’m going to pick the one that gives me the best chance of being around for more than a few years. We had even

directly asked Dr. Dumont if homeopathic options were viable and he vehemently denied that they were. Some remedies can help soothe the side effects of chemotherapy, but they shouldn't be used in place of chemo. Furthermore, homeopathic cures aren't without their own drawbacks. This article from 2015 shows that the FDA has been looking more closely at these remedies, even issuing over 40 letters of warning in the past 6 years alone. While there are no guarantees that chemo will work, stories like Steve Jobs's and statistics like these only reaffirm my belief that giving homeopathic remedies a chance might result in a death sentence.

Ultimately, deciding whether to pursue chemotherapy or to use alternative means of treatment is a personal choice. As I have said numerous times before, my cancer is highly treatable, responds well to chemo, and has a good prognosis. Circumstances are different with every individual, and it comes down to what works best for that patient. I'm personally glad I researched the effectiveness other methods, if for nothing else but peace of mind, and homeopathic remedies may work for some people. However, I knew chemotherapy was the best choice for me.

Click here to read the next part of my story, where I undergo the awkward process of freezing my sperm.

On Thursdays, I am chronicling my journey from discovery to the beginning of chemotherapy. To read through my story up until this point, please click here.

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