“Simplify Cancer: Man’s Guide to Navigating the Everyday Reality of Cancer” — A Book Review

Simplify Cancer by Joe Bakhmouski is a great read for men facing cancer.

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I enjoy regularly chatting about my remaining ‘globe’ with other guys from around the globe. Back in 2018, I appeared on the Simplify Cancer podcast, hosted by Joe Bakhmouski, a fellow Uniballer from the land down under. Shortly after the TCF Summit in August 2019, Joe reached out to me again to share the news that his book, Simplify Cancer: Man’s Guide to Navigating the Everyday Reality of Cancer, was finally finished.

He described it as a “self help manual for men with cancer,” which instantly sparked my interest. Books about lessons learned from a cancer experience, such as Dan Duffy’s The Half Book and Paige Davis’s Here We Grow, have certainly become a niche genre for me.

I asked if Joe would be willing to send me a copy, and a few weeks later, a kangaroo dropped one off on my doorstep. Over the weekend, I finally sat down to read it, and I can definitively say that it’s exactly what I wish I had when I was first diagnosed.

Simplify Cancer: Man’s Guide to Navigating the Everyday Reality of Cancer is well-written, easy to read, and broken into four sections.

Joe weaves his personal story of testicular cancer into actionable steps for male patients and survivors of any diagnosis. I had to laugh as he described his first testicular ultrasound, which is described through the nurse rubbing “oil into my groin and guid[ing] the scan arm around it. Never could I have imagined this moment to be less erotic.” Mirrored my own experience to the letter.

Throughout the book, he addresses what he sees as the four “major challenges that cancer forces you to face:”

1. Why me?
2. What happens now?
3. Who is going to be there for me through cancer?
4. How do I deal with uncertainty?

Without a doubt, these are four crucial areas of need in a cancer patient/survivor's life, and men are unique in some of their needs.

A big tenant of his approach is his AIM process — Accept, Integrate, and Move on.

In each of the four sections, he gives steps to move through this process, such as making a "treaty that spells out how you are going to strip cancer of its power," merging your pre-cancer and post-cancer lives into one path forward, getting your worries out in the open, scheduling a specific time to worry and move on, and many more lessons.

He also delves into the importance of you being in control about how much of your story you want to share.

This also ties into how to address friendships and relationships through cancer. He says people "want to help, they want to be there for you, but they don't know how." As cancer patients and survivors, it's important to communicate with others about what you need, how you're feeling, and how they can support. Perhaps sharing with them a guide on how to talk to a cancer patient could be helpful, as well.

A large part of the book dives into the specific struggles of being a man and facing cancer.

As Joe puts it, "chances are, a major part of your identity has been about putting energy into helping your partner, your family, and your friends… And that's a great way to be, but things are different now that you are going through cancer."

He advocates for making sure you take time to take care of yourself and do what brings you joy. By allowing yourself to shift your priorities and focus, you can navigate through treatment (and life) more effectively and fully.

For me, the most profound quote in the entire book came just 40 pages from the end:

"There is no need to 'take it like a man,' to march on as if everything is just fine."

So often, men want to put on a mask of toughness and act like they can do it all themselves. The simple fact of the matter is we cannot face something like cancer alone, nor should we even attempt to. Furthermore, we don't need to go through life alone. We must open up and share our successes, struggles, and thoughts along the way to help move us all forward.

I highly recommend getting a copy of Simplify Cancer: Man's Guide to Navigating the Everyday Reality of Cancer for any guy facing a cancer experience. It even comes with a free audiobook, online video course, and printable worksheet pages to help navigate this beast that is cancer.

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