Zapping Session # 6

After a week of salvage radiation therapy to treat my prostate cancer, I'm starting to feel what might be side effects.

July 25, 2022 By Dan Zeller

I started my zapping sessions a week ago today and wrapped up my sixth session this morning.

Practicing filling and holding my bladder the week before the zapping started has paid off. I've been successful at filling and keeping a full bladder for every session. Although, on Tuesday there was a delay with the machine of about twenty minutes and I nearly had a bladder explosion on the table. That was cutting it a bit too close.

Every week, usually on Thursdays, I meet with the radiation oncologist to review how I'm doing and to discuss any side effects and answer any questions. That's good.

As far as side effects are concerned, there are a few already popping up.

I'm not sure that it's actually from the radiation yet, or simply because of the need to keep a full bladder, I am finding that I've been emptying my bladder more frequently. I mentioned that to the nurse, and she asked how frequently. I pulled out my phone and opened my log, looked at the numbers, and told her.

"You're keeping a log??? I wish more patients did that!" (It's good to be a nerd at times.)

It's taken me a few days to get in the habit of documenting every time I pee, so that's why you see so many incomplete entries on the first few days.

I'm also beginning to sense some skin irritation (itching, mainly) at the zapping site. It's very mild

and intermittent right now, and may increase over time. The irritation seems to be most prevalent within the first few hours after zapping. I guess it's like a sunburn—it compounds itself as you go along with little time to heal in between. The doctor said that I could apply a moisturizing lotion after being zapped, but definitely not before being zapped.

The final side effect that's beginning to take root is fatigue. I'm not sure that it's actually from the radiation yet, or the fact that I'm peeing frequently through the nights, interrupting my sleep, or a combination of both. A little nap in the afternoon works just fine.

The radiation oncologists and the technicians both confirmed that they check that my bladder is sufficiently full and my rectum sufficiently empty on their scan before they start zapping to minimize any collateral damage. They said that if I wasn't properly prepared, they'd tell me to get off the table and drink more water or poop. That's reassuring to me.

I have to admit that it's a tad annoying to have my retirement non-schedule interrupted by having a structured routine again. I was really getting used to not having to commute or show up to the office at a certain time every day. Of course, I shouldn't complain much because the whole process—driving there, waiting, zapping, and driving back—takes less than 45 minutes. Heck, yesterday, I was through the whole thing in exactly 30 minutes.

I have to admit, too, that I'm being a bit more cautious when going out in public with BA.5 COVID cases on the rise. I continue to wear my mask and am a bit more judicious in determining whether I want to go out. I know that radiation doesn't necessarily compromise your immune system, but the last thing I need is a week or two delay in zapping if I came down with the virus.

So that's my first week/six sessions of zapping under the belt. Thirty-three more to go.

Be well!

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