

Prostate Cancer Research Funding and Male Vanity
by Stan Goldberg, PhD, Prostate Cancer Survivor/Advocate/Activist/Mentor



“Yes, I’ve become stuck in my morning routine of making coffee, reading emails and puttering around the house. When everything else in my life is falling apart, it’s good to do the same thing every day.” S. Goldberg (2009) examiner.com, July 9

As someone who’s living with prostate cancer, I applauded Louis Gossett Jr.’s testimony in Congress on the importance of prostate cancer research funding. If congress was listening, maybe I’ll live long enough for something else to kill me. But according to the American Cancer Society statistics, I shouldn’t hold my breath.

Fifty times more money is spent on research for breast cancer than is spent on prostate cancer. Does that mean there are 50 times more women dying from breast cancer than men dying from prostate cancer? Hardly. Every year 40,000 women die of breast cancer and 34,000 men die of prostate cancer. And yearly, there are only 15,000 more new cases of breast cancer than prostate cancer. Since mortality rates and occurrence figures are similar, what could explain why a woman with breast cancer is thought to be 50 times more important than I am? The answer may be related less to science than it is to male vanity.

Even today, prostate cancer is one of those diseases that for many is spoken of in hushed tones with the same acceptability as talking about gonorrhea, and other “embarrassing” illnesses. Many men with prostate cancer are reluctant to self-disclose because they believe the term automatically implies incontinence, **impotence**, or both. Our silence, for what ever reason, makes it acceptable for oncologists to present treatment “options” as if all were on an equal playing field.

When comparing two procedures an oncologist said to me, “six of one, half-dozen the other,” implying that the research data wasn’t definitive enough for him to decide which was the better procedure for my particular case. And therefore, I had to choose, even though my medical knowledge was derived from watching ER

on **television**. I responded with “So the only way you and I will know if I made the right decision is if I live?” My smart-ass question was met with an embarrassed silence.

While well-known figures such as **Louis Gossett Jr., Senator Christopher Dodd, Ambassador Colin Powell, Harry Belafonte, Senator Bob Dole, Louis Farrakhan, and Robert Goulet**, have courageously discussed their prostate cancer, other less well-known men have not. Many of the 2 million are afraid that **the general** public (and especially women) will look at us and see only reduced sexuality and incontinence, whether or not it’s present and how mildly we might experience either.

I believe our fears parallel those experienced by women 20, 30, or 40 years ago when they received a diagnosis of breast cancer. We need to take a lesson from them. As they stopped looking at themselves as the disease, they took an active stand against it. On **the internet** I typed in “breast cancer fundraising March, 2010.” Just on the first 50 search pages, I found 70 events in 27 different states for March. When I substituted “prostate” for “breast” I found a pitiful 10 events in 8 states.

Maybe women are better organizers than we men. Maybe they are more likely to sponsor philanthropic events. Maybe they are more giving. Or maybe there is a reason that is more fundamental and related to our notions of what defines a “real man.” Our fears about real and perceived sexuality have consequences far beyond our own lives. Our silence perpetuates an inexcusable lack of research **funds** that not only may effect the length of my life, but millions of men who read this article, their sons, and male progenies that follow them. Women have known for a long time that self-worth is not related to the presence or absence of breasts. I think men need to understand that our value as human beings has nothing to do with what happens below our belts.

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4 comments



1.

Kirk
April 21, 2011

I hope truly that men will start standing up as well as, women, who have lost or have fathers, sons, uncles, etc, who have been diagnosed or getting treated for prostate cancer to stop standing and fighting for the right to be heard and have equal justice in have prostate cancer, out and about, it is sad that say, if someone said, what are the colors or color of Prostate Cancer Month, most people could not even tell you, how insulting that is, but if you say, Breast Cancer, it seems like, 90 percent plus know pink is associated with Breast Cancer Colors.

Reply



o

Stan Goldberg
April 21, 2011

Hi Kirk,
Very wise words.
Take Care,
Stan

Reply



2.

Charles (Chuck) Maack
January 24, 2012

Hello Stan....we've exchanged emails in the past. I suspect that because our men's Prostate Cancer disease occurs more often in men with more advanced age, compared to Breast Cancer that can occur in women at younger age, that many such men don't have the energy to get involved at the levels necessary to "rock the boat" to encourage additional funding for Prostate Cancer research. They are more involved in surviving. But you also nailed it with men thinking that their penis is the full extent of their manhood, and want no one to be aware that they may be experiencing erectile or any other dysfunction "down there." And, sadly, too many men that are fortunate enough to catch their cancer early enough for its eradication with treatment, and despite having sought out those of us who provide support, education, and mentoring to help them through the initial scare, are never seen again to even support Prostate Cancer awareness, let alone increased funding for research.

Reply



Stan Goldberg
January 25, 2012

Hi Chuck,

I think age is definitely a variable. But I was struck by a more open attitude by men in the UK. When I was doing research for the article, I began looking for sites and organizations that either were supportive, such as **advancedprostatecancer@yahogroups.com** and groups that in any way were supporting fundraising events for research.

Without a doubt **advancedprostatecancer@yahogroups.com** is the best source for factual and supportive information for men regardless of the extent of their prostate cancer. And I thank you and others for that. It's a group I suggest to anyone with prostate cancer regardless of it's severity and also a site their loved ones should look at.

Unfortunately, I think for some men, the "advanced" part of the title may scare them away—because of their fears and how they want to label their disease. I've come up against that when I've recommended the site.

On the fundraising. The UK's fundraising efforts on behalf of prostate cancer seem to be light years ahead of us—not necessarily in terms of the amount of money raised, but in the number of organizations involved. Maybe it had to do with "moustache" month (their prostate cancer awareness month) but the number of fundraising efforts (those that I found doing an internet search) were 10 times higher than here in the states.

When I wrote my memoir, **Lessons for the Living**, which chronicles four years of my life as a hospice volunteer (it's been 8 years now and I still volunteer) where I talk about my prostate cancer and the people I served, most comments at my presentations were about the deaths of others; rarely did anyone ask about my prostate cancer. It will be interesting to see if people are just as reluctant to bring up the topic with me in my new book on caregiving, **Leaning Into Sharp Points**, which includes caring for those who have prostate cancer.

Anticipating that it will be, I'm writing a novel in which one of the main characters is dying from prostate cancer. I've always found stories to be less threatening for people to deal with difficult topics. Thanks again for your comments and involvement

in **advancedprostatecancer@yahogroups.com**.

Take Care,
Stan