

Prostate cancer and support of the care partner – Carl and Arlene’s story

When Carl was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer, he and his wife Arlene began navigating his cancer journey while still looking to enjoy their retirement – hoping to remain active with family and friends in their retirement community.

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Receiving a cancer diagnosis is life-altering not only for the patient, but also their support system. For Carl, finding out he had metastatic prostate cancer motivated him to learn more about his condition, and work with his wife to ensure he was advocating for himself. For many diagnosed with cancer, patients may find having a caregiver – or more often, *care partner* – to lean on while navigating a diagnosis and potential treatment options, can be very helpful.

The care partner role during a patient’s journey with prostate cancer varies greatly. Often times, it is a partnership, working together to manage the patient’s care – from scheduling medical appointments and helping navigate and understand treatment options, to providing emotional support and companionship. For many with prostate cancer, as the physical and emotional toll from the disease increases, so does the need for emotional and physical support.

Care partners tend to be partners such as a husband or wife, but family members, such as siblings and adult children, and friends can play important roles too. Cancer support groups can also help to connect patients with a care partner if they are in need of support.

For Carl and Arlene, they have worked together closely with his care team over the last few years to navigate his prostate cancer treatment.

I took a very active approach to my diagnosis when I learned I had prostate cancer, and it’s been helpful having my wife by my side throughout this journey. Sometimes even if you’re comfortable advocating for yourself and are still feeling good physically, it’s beneficial to have someone by your side – going to appointments with you, discussing the different treatment options and helping to ease the emotional burden of having prostate cancer.

Carl, living with metastatic prostate cancer

Meet Carl

As Carl began his retirement after dedicating many years in his professional career as a compliance officer, he was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer.

Carl's health always remained at the top of his priority list and after a routine visit with his urologist, his bloodwork showed a significant increase in his prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels. His urologist ordered a biopsy and told him he should see an oncologist. "What? I need to see an oncologist? An oncologist is for someone who has cancer," he remembers thinking.

After he underwent a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)/ultrasound fusion guided biopsy and genetic testing, his care team determined he had metastatic prostate cancer. With more than 1.4 million new cases and 375 000 deaths in 2020 alone, prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in over 50% of countries (112/185)^{1,2}. The 5-year survival rate for most men with regional prostate cancer is nearly 100%³. For men with advanced prostate cancer when they are diagnosed, the 5-year survival rate drops from nearly 100% to approximately 30%³.

Following his diagnosis, Carl got to work – he knew it would be important to understand his diagnosis, potential treatment options and what the future may hold for him. Having a very detail-oriented job for many years, he began mapping out his treatment plan with his care team while conducting a lot of his own research about prostate cancer and treatment options. He believes that ongoing participation in prostate cancer support groups has provided him with invaluable guidance throughout his treatment journey.

I believe advocating for yourself and building a supportive care team is vital to your treatment journey. I was told my prostate cancer is terminal and there isn't a cure. I found an oncologist that listened to my concerns and answered my questions about my options – I wanted to ensure that I had a care team that would advocate for my health.

Carl, living with metastatic prostate cancer

Meet Arlene

Arlene, Carl's wife of over 40 years, was frightened when Carl received his diagnosis. Having just begun their retirement, she and Carl were worried his diagnosis would put an end to their plans together to travel and spend quality time with friends, family and their young grandchildren. Carl was determined to take action when he received his diagnosis, and with Arlene's love and support, Carl and Arlene began navigating his prostate cancer treatment journey.

After we received Carl's prostate cancer diagnosis, I was filled with many emotions and fear, but Carl took the lead right away. He worked very closely with his care team and has continued to do so with my support to determine the best treatment options for him. Throughout my husband's journey,

I have learned that sometimes it's been important to just be there. Be there for the person you love and support them – whether that is by helping them attend appointments and listening to the doctors, or by just being a supportive wife and partner.

Arlene, Carl's wife

Arlene supports Carl by helping him navigate his care by attending doctor appointments and discussing treatment options, but she also continuously provides important emotional support, reminding Carl that, despite his cancer diagnosis, they will continue to enjoy living for the “now” and appreciating the life they have together.

Additional Resources

Resources for those with prostate cancer and their care partners

- Zero - <https://zerocancer.org/learn/loved-ones-caregivers/>
- Prostate Cancer Foundation - <https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/patient-navigation/for-caregivers/>
- CancerCare - <https://www.cancercare.org/caregiver-resources>

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Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in more than half of the world's countries. Our goal is to use the science of targeted therapies to reduce the global disease burden, extend the lives of patients, and elevate current standards of care.

Learn more

1. Ferlay J, Siegel RL, Sung H, et al. Global cancer statistics 2020: GLOBOCAN estimates of incidence and mortality worldwide for 36 cancers in 185 countries. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2021;71(3):225-227. doi:10.3322/caac.21660.
2. Giona S. The epidemiology of prostate cancer. In: *Prostate Cancer.* 2021:1. doi:10.36255/exonpublications.prostatecancer.epidemiology.2021.
3. SEER. Cancer stat facts: prostate cancer. April 2021. <https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/prost.html>.

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List of links present in page

1. <https://prod1.novartis.com/stories/prostate-cancer-and-support-care-partner-carl-and-arlenes-story>
2. <https://prod1.novartis.com/tags/category/patient-perspectives>
3. <https://zerocancer.org/learn/loved-ones-caregivers/>
4. <https://www.pcf.org/patient-resources/patient-navigation/for-caregivers/>
5. <https://www.cancercare.org/caregiver-resources>
6. <https://prod1.novartis.com/diseases/prostate-cancer>
7. <https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/prost.html>