



Respectful Assertiveness

A Tool in the Fight against Prostate Cancer

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***“Be who you are and say  
how you feel, because those  
who mind don’t matter and  
those who matter don’t  
mind.”***

**Dr. Seuss**

We are the **most important force** in the fight against prostate cancer. It is true that when most of us hear the diagnosis of prostate cancer, we experience the victimization of the disease. Some of us are able to respond in an assertive way and begin to realize that being the patient means we have to fight for what is best and thus becoming an active partner with our treatment providers helps us embrace the disease and be less a victim of the disease. Our mouth is an extremely positive and effective weapon in fighting this disease. However, how we express ourselves is also effective in helping detect this disease at an early stage, thus improving the outcomes for both us and our families. One major downfall among African American men is that we present for treatment all too often with advanced disease, resulting in poorer outcomes.

Any health provider’s worth their weight in gold knows that the yearly digital rectal exam and the PSA has been the most effective tool in the fight against prostate cancer. When the United States Preventative Task Force recommended ending the use of the PSA it left African American men standing alone at the altar. The assumption that you will die from a disease other than prostate cancer fails African American men. They offered no suggestion to the medical community and to men as to how to determine whether the cancer was slow growing or fast growing. Since, African American men have a higher incidence of not having a primary care provider and are quite averse to submitting to the digital rectal exam we die from this disease in greater numbers.

How do we address this situation in light of the continued high death rates and the USPTF removing from the table one of the best tools our providers have in the fight against prostate cancer. We do know that most physicians thankfully recognize that the DRE and PSA is the most effective tool available. The PCA3 is a new tool currently available to help tell whether the cancer is slow growing or fast growing. The PCA3 requires a prostatic massage prior to taking the urine sample, but the gene evidence released into the urine allows the clinician to answer the fast growing vs. slow growing question. The USPTF made no mention of the PCA3 and the most recent series in the News and Observer never mentioned it. It was disappointing that the medical director of the Institute of Health and the Duke Cancer center also never mentioned it, but it does allow a patient to make a truly informed decision as to whether active surveillance should be pursued or immediate treatment.

With all of that said how does respectful assertiveness a play role in this fight. When we learn to communicate in a respectful and assertive manner our outcomes are better for ourselves and our family. We must be able to communicate our concerns and wishes to our providers as active involvement in our own health care makes the best sense. Being passive only adds to our feelings of being a victim, thus adding more of an emotional burden.

What is assertive communication? Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, opinions and feelings in an honest and open manner. We are using words to stand up for ourselves, while respecting the one we are communicating with. In the office with your provider you are balancing getting what you need with being respectful of the position of our health care provider is in as they direct our care. We convey that we have faith in what our provider recommends. Having knowledge of our disease is paramount as not knowing everything about our disease leads to a poorer outcome time and time again. We know that women have led the fight in respectful assertiveness as when the USPTF recommended ending the use of the mammogram, women and providers cried foul and they backed up and insurance companies continue to reimburse for mammograms.

We as men must become aggressive in taking charge of our health care also. Falling to the adage of waiting until near you are dead before you go to the doctor only shortens our lives and hurts our family. We men must become like the women and become informed patients. With the internet we live in a time where knowledge is a click away. So communicating with our health care providers is vitally important for both us and our family. There are three styles of communication that people use. Passive, assertive and aggressive.

## **PASSIVE:**

- Tends to give in to other peoples wishes
- Has difficulty saying no to people
- Has a hard time making decisions

## **AGGRESSTIVE:**

- Tends to be concerned only for their own needs
- Has a tendency to lose their temper
- May openly criticize or find fault with others opinions

## **ASSERTIVE:**

- Concerned with both the needs of oneself and the needs of others
- Able to express themselves with others
- Able to respond in a respectful manner when there is a disagreement

Being able to effectively use the time available in a doctor's appointment becomes extremely important. Preparing for the appointment is a mandatory. You have been diagnosis with prostate cancer and knowing the facts allows us to ask the important questions. This allows us to make informed decisions that affect us and our families. When we meet with our provider we must make direct eye contact and speak clearly and calmly. Being specific and direct in making your points makes a Hugh difference.

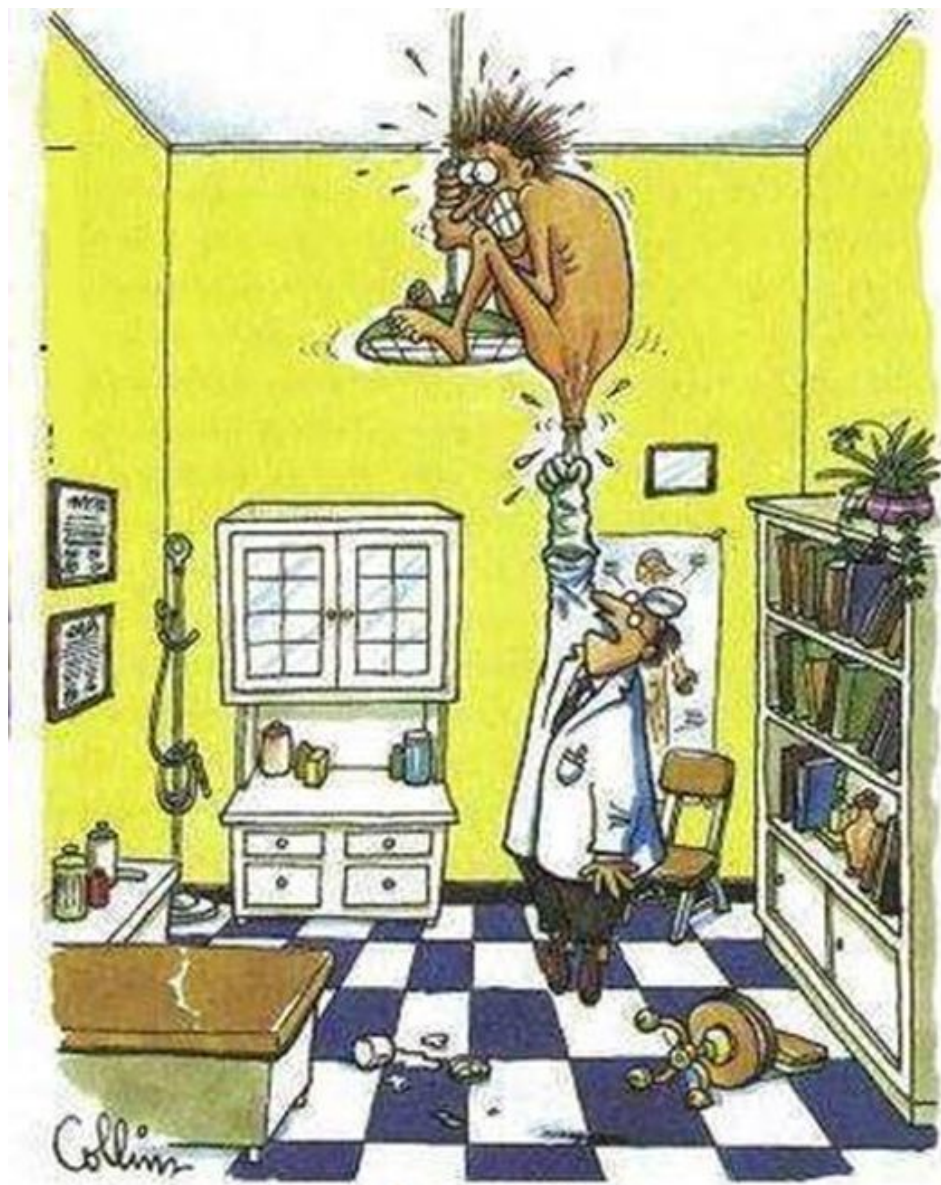


When your provider hears and recognizes that you have done your home work, the interaction can lead to a better outcome. Providers are human so they need help like you need help and knowing your own options are important. Sometimes we feel pressured to make an immediate decision and this is when respectful assertiveness becomes a life saver. Being able to make statements such as “ I will need more time to figure out what direction I need to take, can you refer to a good resource to gain more information?” or “ Can you give me a few days to research my options and to discuss this with my wife.” At the ends of the appointment with your doctor sum up the main point and your agreement to do your homework. The next appointment will result in a meeting that will lead to a definitive care plan.

When confronted by the provider with a medical recommendation that you are not comfortable with, respectful assertiveness comes in very handy. That discussion could sound like this. “Mr. Jones we no longer recommend a PSA due to some recent changes in medical thinking”. A respectful response could be, “ Yea’ doc you are referring to that task force recommendation, but it didn’t in into account the problems in black men, don’t you think that needs to be taken into consideration!” Your physician will take a moment to think and what he or she says will lead you to ponder your next move. If your physician discounts the well know fact that 1 in 4 black men develop prostate cancer, that African American men develop a more aggressive version of the decision more often and that the Task Forced failed to consider the morbidity and mortality rates for black men you have some soul searching to do.

We as men deserve the best possible care and taking anything less is unacceptable. You may need to respectfully respond with “ Dr. Jones, I will need to seek a second opinion as what I have read does not support your recommendation. You have been a good doctor for me, but this is cancer!” Being able to respond in a respectful manner will hopefully allow you to continue this medical relationship and still get the care that is needed to save your life and to continue to be there for your family. We have the right to disagree, but in the end it is our decision to act or not act and we need and deserve a health care provider that is our advocate and champion in this fight against prostate cancer.

I close with the following. We are our best advocate, but at times we need help, so remember bring a family member to each appointment to support you and to assist you in making sure your feelings and wants are heard and taken into consideration. As a member of the Action Team, we live our motto: Carrying the Sword against Prostate Cancer for the Next Generation!



Relax, it's only a DRE



