

Listen Up

A collection of personal stories highlighting
the journeys and challenges of African Caribbean
men and women affected by prostate cancer

Introduction

Cancer affects everyone differently. Whether you're a man with prostate cancer, a friend, relative, or a carer, we all experience the disease in our own unique way.

The prostate is an intimate part of the body; it affects a man's waterworks and sex life. So the disease often challenges our particular prejudices, taboos and embarrassments in ways that other types of cancer do not. Some of those challenges are cultural.

In this booklet, African Caribbean men and women affected by prostate cancer reveal how the disease has touched their lives. They describe through their own personal accounts how it has forced them to challenge their beliefs and values, in order to stay alive or help those close to them.

To fight cancer requires more than just medical treatment – the whole person has to be treated. Personal or social issues that arise need to be understood by everyone involved in someone's care. We hope, therefore, that this booklet will help with that understanding, and give hope, confidence and strength to those people living with or affected by prostate cancer.

All the stories are based on real people facing prostate cancer. Names and identifying features, however, have been changed.

The Prostate Cancer Charity is fighting prostate cancer on every front – through research, support, information and campaigning.

If you have any questions about prostate cancer, please contact our free and confidential Helpline to speak to a specialist nurse.



Confidential Helpline
0800 074 8383

Mon – Fri 10am – 4pm,
Wed 7pm – 9pm

Calls are free of charge from UK landlines. Mobile phone charges may vary.

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I have what?

A boyfriend's story

"You have cancer of the prostate gland," the doctor told me.

"Oh," was all that came out of my mouth. My mind had suddenly shut down. I heard the word cancer and I heard him saying something about treatment and success rates but that was it. I felt about a million miles away all of a sudden, like I was eavesdropping on a conversation on another planet. I walked out in a daze; couldn't even find where I'd parked my car. For days I was like that. Told my lady friend, Alicia. But I just repeated what the doctor said: "I have cancer of the prostate gland."

She leapt up. "What? What is that? What does that mean? Are you going to die? What's going to happen? Is there a cure? And where is this prostate? Tell me what's going on! I can't cope with this! I need to know what I'm supposed to do. Should I book time off work?"

I had no answers for her. I just watched her going into meltdown and wondered if I would ever feel close to her, or anyone else, ever again. A gauze had come down all around me, filtering out anything bright or sharp or dramatic. Everything felt dull and fuzzy. Normally, I would have started talking back quickly and answering all her questions and trying to calm Alicia down. But I couldn't.

"Did you even ask the doctor?" she said.

"I didn't know what to say or what to ask," I replied softly.

"Well, what did he say? Did he say you have to have an operation? Chemotherapy? What?"

"I couldn't follow what he was saying. There were just all these words coming out of his mouth that didn't mean anything."

“Right, well in that case we’re booking an appointment to see this doctor again right now. And this time I am going to come with you, and we are going to find out everything we need to know.”

You can always rely on Alicia in a crisis. They should send her in to countries where there’s been an earthquake. She’d get things sorted out in no time! As it was, she made another appointment and sat me down to write a list of all the questions we needed answers to: What is a prostate? What are my chances? Who is going to look after me? How will I pay the mortgage?

We went back to the doctor and this time the fuzziness started to fade. I tried as hard as I could to listen to everything the doctor said. Thank God I had Alicia with me, because every time he used some medical term she would get him to explain it. And every time he said something complicated she would get him to repeat it. She even bought one of those Dictaphone things to record everything he said, so afterwards we went home and listened all over again.

We both felt so much better, like the veil had been removed and we could see what we were dealing with. There’s nothing worse than fear of the unknown. But now it wasn’t unknown. I felt like I had more power now, just through understanding what was wrong and what was going to happen next. Also, just knowing how much help and support was out there made a massive difference. I had no idea how much help the cancer charities give people. Even with practical things. Suddenly I could see a way through.

Really importantly too I had a much better idea about what to look out for in my own body. We asked all about when I should phone the doctor, which symptoms were cause for concern and which were to be expected. I can be a bit of a hypochondriac sometimes – you know, just always thinking I’ve got the ‘flu when actually it’s just a cold – so it really helped knowing what to look for and what not to worry about.

At least no one could accuse me of hypochondria now. I had a

feeling something really was wrong when I went to see my GP. I'd been having really weird pains in my lower back and hips for a while and, really embarrassingly, I started having problems when it came to having sex. At first I just thought I was stressed, but it's so unlike me that I knew I had to go and get advice. Thankfully I did, because now I stand a good chance. They caught it early apparently so the prognosis is pretty good. And with Alicia helping me to keep on top of things, asking a million questions for me when my mind shuts down, and with the help we're getting from the charities and our families, I just know we're going to cope. Buying that Dictaphone was the best idea we ever had!

You want to put your finger up where?

A real man's story

The way I was brought up, men are men and women are women. Being a man was all about being strong, protecting yourself and your family, being the provider, and never giving into weakness. It was your job as a man to stand tall. You had to be a winner, make something of yourself, and, of course, be a hit with the ladies. From 18 I was going down the gym, pumping iron to pump up my muscles, and showing off my physique whenever I could. And sure enough, women noticed and showed their approval. I was never without a girlfriend. As the eldest of four boys I felt I had to set an example to my brothers as to how to be a man. I gave them advice on chatting up girls and how to deal with bullies. They looked up to me.

After two marriages, and a few affairs, I got a bit of a reputation as a player. That is, until one girl started telling people that I couldn't get it up. The worst thing was, she wasn't lying. I couldn't tell anyone, or confide in anyone. They would have laughed at me. And anyway, I was too ashamed. But that alone wouldn't have gotten me into the GP's surgery. No, the truth is that I was scared. I noticed some blood when I went to the loo and I had this aching feeling. The blood really freaked me out so I made an appointment and explained everything to my doctor.

"Well I'm going to need to examine you," he said. "If you could pop behind the curtain, undo your trousers and lie on your side then I will then put my finger up your bottom and feel around."

"What?" I spat in disbelief. "You're going to do what? Are you gay? Is that why? This isn't right. I'm not letting you put anything up there."

"I do understand your reaction Mr. Johnston, but in order for me to have a better idea of what's wrong with you I need to be able

to investigate what's going on down there. I can assure you this is an essential medical examination and if you're really uncomfortable about it I can ask a nurse to step in as a chaperone."

The idea of having a female nurse in the room with me while I lay there with my trousers round my ankles and a doctor putting his finger up me seemed like a whole lot worse. The shame of it was bad enough without having a woman watching. The only people that had anything put up their bums were gay people as far as I was concerned. What if, by the doctor putting his finger up me, it made me gay? What if someone found out that had been done to me? I'd never live it down. No woman would ever want to come near me again.

But then the way things were going with the rumour spreading about my inadequacies in the bedroom department, they may never again anyway, I thought. So what did I have to lose? This guy seemed genuine enough. He showed me a diagram of down there and what could be causing the problem and therefore why he needed a close look and what could happen if he didn't investigate it thoroughly and so in the end I gave in. What's more important, I wondered, my health or my pride? Only a fool would say pride.

The doctor reassured me that everything that is said between a doctor and his patient is confidential and that at any point if I wanted him to stop to let him know.

I took a deep breath, prayed no one would ever find out, and that the doctor was telling me the truth and went behind the curtain. Only in the showers at the gym had I been in any way exposed in front of another man. And at least then it was normal to be naked with other guys around. Here it just seemed odd. In my mind I kept telling myself that real men face their fears rather than running away from them. And a real man wouldn't let a silly thing like a doctor's examination come before their health.

I undid my trousers and pulled them and my boxer shorts down,

and lay on my left side facing the wall, just as the doctor had told me. I stared at a mark on the paintwork as the doctor drew back the curtain and told me to relax. I thought about being on the beach in Jamaica, swimming in the warm sea, and anything else I could to not think about what was going on behind me.

But then I felt it, and suddenly there was a pain. It was over pretty quickly though and as soon as I got my trousers back up and went and sat back at the doctor's desk I felt back to my old strong self again.

As it turned out, I was going to need all the strength I had.

I thought he was protecting me!

A daughter's story

My parents have always been very different in the way they treated my sister and me. My mum was always the one who would let us go and play with our friends or go into town or, as we got older, stay out late. But my dad! Well, we were lucky if he let us out of his sight! He was always telling us how bad men can be, how careful we needed to be and how he was just trying to look after us.

I knew he was right, but it didn't half annoy me sometimes. Normally, I would go and ask my mum if I wanted to go to a party that would go on late. It was always good to know how much he cared about us though. It was only after I left home that I started to doubt his love for me.

It all started around the time that I announced my engagement to my now husband. I thought that my dad liked Jonathan, but he arrived two hours late for our engagement party! He said his car had broken down. But he'd only just bought it, so it seemed a little odd.

"Maybe he just had an afternoon nap, overslept, and was too embarrassed to admit it," Jonathan suggested the next day.

But as father of the bride-to-be, he didn't exactly take his duties seriously, when it came to arranging the wedding. Every time I tried to meet him to discuss the plans, there was always another excuse as to why he couldn't make it: "Oh your grandma isn't feeling well, I need to just check in on her," was one such excuse. "Your mother asked me to do the grocery shopping because she has a migraine," was another. I didn't believe him. And the lies just seemed to get bigger as the wedding was approaching. What was going on? I wondered. Does he not approve of Jonathan? Is he trying to warn me off my fiancé

through showing his lack of interest? It was all so odd. I even confronted him one day. “You don’t seem very interested in my wedding,” I said, half expecting an argument.

But he just looked sad and replied: “I am, you’re my daughter, this is the most important day of your life, of course I’m interested. I’ve just got a lot on at the moment.”

Still it didn’t ring true. But there was worse to come. The lies started escalating. A week before the wedding he phoned me up to say that he had to go away on business for two weeks and that he would therefore have to miss the wedding.

At this, I just lost it. “But Dad, this is my wedding!” I shouted. “You can’t not be there. I don’t want to get married unless I have you to give me away. You’re my father! How can you possibly not be there? What business trip could ever be more important than your daughter’s wedding? I don’t understand you. I thought you loved me. I thought you loved Jonathan. Why are you doing this? What’s going on? Are you trying to hurt me? Are you trying to ruin the most important day of my life? Are you?”

My voice was cracking, I burst into tears. Jonathan, hearing me from upstairs, came down to see if I was alright.

“I’m sorry,” was all my dad could say.

“Sorry is not good enough, Dad. So come on, tell me, what’s this business trip? Why’s it so important that you couldn’t possibly miss it and come to my wedding?”

“Well it’s a, er, conference,” he mumbled. “I’ve been told I have to go, that there’s no getting out of it.”

“Do you know something, Dad?” I asked him, wiping my cheeks with my sleeve. “I don’t believe you. There’s something else going on that you’re not telling me. The whole time I’ve been planning the wedding, you’ve ducked out of it all, with one excuse after another. So tell me, admit it, you don’t approve of Jonathan

do you? It's because he's white isn't it? You don't think I should marry a white man?"

"What?" he replied, baffled. "No, of course not. I totally approve of Jonathan. But this wedding is expensive and I have to step up my game at work to try and get a promotion to help pay for it."

"Oh I see," I said, sarcastically. "So it's all about money, is it? Well that's alright then. You value money over me and my wedding. I feel so much better now."

There was a silence on the other end of the line. I was starting to feel angry now.

"Well if it's a money issue, why is it that as soon as we announced the engagement, you started acting funny before you had any idea what we were planning to spend on the wedding? For all you knew we could have been having a cheap register office wedding followed by a few drinks down the local pub. Admit it: you just can't bare to see your little girl be taken away from you by another man. That's it, isn't it?"

More silence. "No, that's not it," he said eventually. "I can see I'm going to have to tell you what's going on. Upsetting you before the wedding was exactly what I was trying to avoid and it looks like I've managed to do it anyway. You see, the truth is, I can't come because I have to go into hospital. I have to have an operation. It's prostate cancer."

I dropped the phone. The next day we postponed the wedding. Six months later he gave me away. I've never felt so proud of him.

Embarrassed to talk

A son's story

My dad had always been pretty strict and old-fashioned. Respect was drummed into my brother and me from an early age. We asked before we left the dinner table, we never spoke out of turn and Lord help us if we forgot to say please or thank you! He kept a tight reign on us, my dad. But he was always fair and kind and encouraging. Education was everything, he told us, and before we could do anything after coming home from school, homework had to be done and shown to him to prove we'd done it. I never doubted he loved us though. I could see the pride in his eyes when my brother or I came top in the class.

When I went away to university – the first person in our family! – he sat me down and told me what a great achievement it was. But that was about as emotional as he would get around us. Most of the time there was a sternness to him. He'd worked hard all his life to support us and develop a standing within the community. There wasn't really room for much else. Feelings weren't discussed – you just got on with it.

So one Christmas when I came home from university to find him acting strangely, I didn't know what to do. He was constantly excusing himself to go to the lavatory. I would wake up during the night - several times – to hear him creeping downstairs and then flushing the toilet.

As a medical student, I knew that a man in his late fifties who kept needing the toilet was not a good combination, particularly in our community, where prostate problems are more common. But this was a man who had never sat us down and explained the facts of life to us. Talking about going to the toilet was therefore totally off limits.

Plus, he was acting as if everything was totally normal. He didn't

seem at all concerned as he got up for the fifth time during a TV programme to visit the lavatory. But I knew something was wrong. And I knew I should say something. This was my dad, after all. I just didn't know what to say. If it had been someone on the wards at the university hospital I would know exactly how to phrase it.

But how could I get my dad to seek medical advice – a man who'd never asked for help or advice from anyone – when I couldn't even broach the subject with him? The last thing I wanted was for him to think I was overstepping the mark and being disrespectful towards him. Actually, no, there was something I wanted much less than that – for my dad to be ill and not get treated.

So I waited until my brother had gone out to see a friend one Saturday afternoon and started edging towards the subject. "This term's been really interesting," I told him as we sat in the kitchen. "We've been learning all about urology." He looked at me slightly strangely. "And one of the things they went into was about how men as they get older need to start looking out for certain signs."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, older men have a greater risk of developing certain problems.

"I see," he said, not sounding interested.

"Yes, there are signs that as doctors we are taught to look out for and talk to our more mature male patients about. One of them is needing to go to the bathroom more regularly."

He looked up from his newspaper at me, as if rumbled, but I carried on. "It can be a sign that something is wrong, or at least that it needs investigating."

"Right," he said, still not giving me an inch. But I'd started now, so I was not going to chicken out.

“And Dad, the thing is, I think it might be worth you going to see a doctor.”

“Why?”

“Well, because, you, er, seem to be excusing yourself more than usual.”

He coughed and closed his newspaper. “Well, I’ve been drinking lots of tea lately,” he replied.

“Even so Dad, I really think it would be a good idea for you to go and see your doctor, you know, just to make sure. Like having a check up, just for peace of mind’s sake. It’s really simple, your GP can just do a quick examination and ask you a few questions and that would be it.”

“An examination?”

“Er yes, it’s nothing to worry about. But if you are worried I can go with you to the GP’s.”

“No that won’t be necessary, thank you,” he replied.

“So does that mean you’ll go?”

“Well, perhaps I’ll think about it,” he said.

A few days later, I overheard him booking an appointment over the phone, the first time I’ve ever known him go to the doctor’s. He didn’t mention to me that he’d done it, but when I’d gone back to university I received a phone call from my brother one evening.

“Dad’s gone into hospital,” he told me. I got the first train home.

Is he seeing someone else?

A wife's story

The signs were all there. Bill had started becoming increasingly distant towards me. There were the little things like him not hugging me as tightly as he normally would, not listening to me like he used to and constantly seeming distracted. And then there were the more obvious signs, like us not making love anymore. It was only when we went to church that Bill seemed to really connect to anyone or anything – he could talk to God in a way he used to talk to me. All these things made me worry; but the other signs made me angry.

He would come home late and lie about where he'd been. After fifteen years of marriage, I learned to spot the clues and know when he was lying. So when he looked away as he told me, "There was a problem at work that I had to deal with," or "The trains were delayed," I didn't believe him for a second. But how could I confront him? If I was wrong, I would be unfairly calling him a liar. That's a big accusation and one that could harm our marriage. The way I was feeling – vulnerable, scared and insecure – I couldn't risk that. No, I knew that I had to bide my time, and wait for proof. If Bill was seeing another woman it wouldn't be long before I had the evidence right in front of me. About this, at least, and the lying, I was right.

Bill's not the tidiest of people; he's always leaving dirty clothes on the floor and dishes in the sink. I can't stand it, so I make it my business to keep the house in order – for my sake more than anything. One day I was picking up a load of his dirty clothes and sorting through to separate the colours from the whites (he's always leaving tissues and coins in his trouser pockets so I went through them all to check) and that's when I found it: the phone number.

It was in the back pocket of some jeans – a folded up white envelope and a number scrawled in black biro. But there was no name next to it. I sat on our bed and held it out in front of me, just staring at it. Could this be it? I thought. Is this the evidence? I felt sick, like I'd been kicked in the stomach. But with no name next to the number, how could I take it to him and accuse him of cheating on me? What if I was wrong? After all, it was just a number. I knew there was only one solution – to dial it. The following morning I waited until Bill had left for work, sat in the hall next to the phone and tried to breathe really slowly, just to keep myself calm. I picked up the receiver and dialled the number, waiting for a woman's voice to answer.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I heard instead. It was a man's voice saying, "The Prostate Cancer Charity, how can I help you?" I slammed the phone straight down again. What did this mean? Has my Bill got cancer? The sick feeling returned, but this time there was no anger, just fear mixed with guilt. Why didn't he come to me? Am I such a bad wife that my own husband couldn't tell me he was ill? I spent the rest of the day trying to distract myself as best I could – I finished the washing, did the dishes, the hoovering, and dusted things that didn't need it. And when they were all done, I paced and paced, waiting for Bill to come home.

When I heard his key in the door I got up to greet him, but as soon as I saw him the fear melted away into sadness. "Do you have cancer?" I blurted out, my voice cracking as I spoke, holding up the unfolded envelope. But instead of answering me with words, Bill just looked me in the eye and told me with the tiniest look that yes, he did. Only when you've known someone that long can so much be said with so little. It was a mixture of "It's going to be okay," "I'm scared," and "I'm sorry I kept this from you; I was ashamed."

We hugged tighter and for longer than we had in months, and stayed up all night talking.

Many similarities

A brother's story

My twin brother Albert and I were diagnosed with prostate cancer just a few months apart. Fittingly, I suppose, being the oldest by a few minutes, I got the diagnosis before him. It was February. I remember how cold and dark everything was, and how cold and dark I felt, like the world was mirroring me.

“I’m only 51,” I kept thinking. Albert was the only person I could tell. I’m not someone who would blurt something like that out to anyone. I prefer to deal with things on my own. I’ve always been the same. Even growing up I was expected to look out for Albert because I never made a fuss about anything, so everyone thought I was the strong one. Now, I’m not so sure they were right.

Albert lives right near my wife Celia and me. So I asked him to meet me in our local for a drink. As soon as I told him the news he fixed me with this stare.

“You’re going to beat this,” he told me. “Just tell me what you need me to do.”

I was taken aback. I thought he would get up and excuse himself and go and walk round the beer garden to collect himself. But for all his fighting talk I just felt terrified. I didn’t know if I could beat it, or if I had enough fight left in me. Celia and I lost our daughter a few years ago. Hit and run. 10 years old. It took everything I had to keep the family together and get through that. I bit my lip so many times that for two years all I could taste was blood. To be given yet another blow like this just seemed like too much, too cruel, too horrible.

“Have you told Celia?” Albert asked me.

I shook my head.

“You have to,” he scolded.

“I can’t. I don’t know how to.”

He paused for a minute. “Well, if you don’t then I will.”

I knew I couldn’t let him do that - that it had to come from me. As if he could read my mind he added: “Okay, well then I’ll come with you, right now.”

We walked back to my house in near silence. I don’t know how I would have done it had he not been there. From that day on he’s kept me propped up. He made sure I kept my hospital appointments, he read up on everything – something I was too afraid to do – and explained as much as he could to Celia and me.

He even dealt with my rages. I’ve never been one of those men that loses their cool; I was always too in control. But this, this was different. Fear had me in a headlock so tight that it made my body shake, as if it was trying to break free. Mixed with that was an anger that I had never felt before. It was as if all the anger towards the driver of that car had been stored up and was waiting for an excuse to come out. We’d be driving to the hospital and if someone cut in front of us I would shout the most awful, awful things out the window. I snapped at Celia constantly. “Stop fussing! Leave me alone! I’m fine!” I would bark.

But Albert just dealt with it. He would take me out to the woods near my house and tell me to shout as loud as I possibly could. Or he’d just make me stop the car and would take over the driving. When he was diagnosed in the September he responded with such determination and such a positive attitude that I felt shamed by my own reactions to the same problem. How could he, the boy who always went running home crying to mum, how could he be the one who was the strong one? But I admired him more than I hated myself for being so weak. I started to sense the words going round Celia’s head: “Why can’t you be more like your brother?”

If only. His determination won out in the end – he got the all clear, whereas mine came back. But still he was there, still he didn't run away, still he kept positive, focused. In the end he fought my cancer for me. Or at least, gave me the strength I was lacking to fight it for myself. If it weren't for Albert I wouldn't be here. Celia would have lost her whole family.

How do I stop my son from getting it?

A family story

I'm 73 now and have been fighting prostate cancer for two years. It didn't come as such a shock to me as it would have done to most men because my dad had it and I was told that there's an increased risk of getting it if it's in the family.

Luckily, because I knew what the risks were – particularly given that as a black man I was already three times more likely to get it – I went for regular check ups. So the doctors caught it early. The way things are going I'll most likely die of something else before the cancer gets me. It's been tough though, and, I'm not ashamed to admit it, frightening.

But what scares me more than anything is thinking about my sons. I have two: Robert who's 49 now and Steve who's 46. With both their father and their grandfather getting prostate cancer, what chance do they have of not getting it? My doctor has told me that, given their age, as well as everything else, it's really important they come for check ups. The problem is that neither of them will.

Despite everything that's happened to me and what happened to my father, I just can't get through to them. I tried speaking to Robert first, as being the eldest I thought that maybe if I could get him to come, Steve might listen to him and follow suit.

So I went round to Robert's house one Saturday afternoon as I often do to watch the match. He's always been a bit funny about my illness and doesn't really ever like talking about it. When my wife told him, he slammed the phone down and didn't phone back until the following day. So during half time when I turned to him and said "Robert, I was at the doctor's the other day..." he cut me off saying:

“Oh one second Dad I just want to hear what they’re saying.”

“Robert this is important,” I insisted. He stayed silent and looked straight ahead at the TV. But I kept going. “I was at the doctor’s and he was telling me that because I’ve got the same cancer your grandad had there’s a chance you might have inherited a weakness for it.”

“I haven’t got a weakness for nothing,” he said, still facing the telly. “Except beer.”

“Well, the chances are you do have a weakness for prostate cancer.”

“Don’t want to hear it Dad, I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it.”

“But that’s the point. If you go and get yourself checked out you might not ever have to really deal with it, or if you do, you’ll catch it so early it won’t become an issue.”

“Don’t want to know Dad, not until I have to.”

“By which time it might be too late.”

“Is that why you came round today? To tell me I’m gonna die? Thanks a lot.”

“No, I want to make sure you stay healthy.”

“What and have some old geezer shove a tube up my arse? Don’t think so.”

“Not even if it saves your life?”

At this he picked up the remote control and turned the volume way up to drown me out. I put down my beer, told him to think about it and left.

He hasn’t mentioned it since.

With that attempt hardly a resounding success I went to see my youngest, Steve, to see if I could make some headway with him. At least Steve is married with kids so he might see sense – or at

least his wife, Yvonne, might make him see sense.

I made sure I went round when I knew she was going to be there. Yvonne's a strong woman who generally gets her way! So I sat them both down and told them what the risks were for him.

"He's right Steve," said Yvonne. "You should go and see your GP and have him examine you."

"It's really not that bad at all," I added. I'm not sure he believed me, but he did promise he would go. That was six months ago and every time I ask him if he's been he makes up an excuse as to why he hasn't.

"I couldn't get an appointment," he told me to begin with. Then it was "I had to cancel at the last minute because I was called in to work." And as the excuses kept coming, I stopped asking. What's the point? I can't drag him to the doctor kicking and screaming like I did when he was three.

I know what the problem is with both of them: they're terrified. They're terrified of thinking about the illness because if they do that means having to think about me dying, and therefore, the possibility of them dying. I just hope they change their minds before it's too late.

Hysterectomy? No prostatectomy!

A grandfather's story

I've never been one for going to the doctor. I always preferred to just wait until things got better of their own accord. But when the pain I was experiencing didn't go away I knew I didn't have much choice. I just don't understand doctors half the time. When they start speaking all I hear is jargon and medical terms and I just want to scream "La la la!" at them. Normally it doesn't matter – the few times I have gone they've just slipped me a prescription for something and the chemist will end up telling me what to do. But with this it's different. There is no pharmacist around to tell me what treatment I should opt for. I wish I could just go to Boots and ask them.

Just being in hospitals surrounded by all the machinery and the smell and funny noises makes me want to run. It's about the last place I want to be to sit and absorb all the information I'm being given and make some kind of sensible choice. And this time, it's not just my GP that's jabbering away trying to explain things to me; it's loads of different doctors. And every time I try and ask them what they think or what they recommend or what they would do, each of them starts telling me something different. It's a nightmare.

I've been sat there while they've explained my different options, and each thing they mention I think, "Oh I don't think I'll do that one, I wonder what the next option is?" and then they get to the end of the list and there's nothing I want done.

The first thing one of the doctors mentioned was a "radical prostatectomy".

"A what?" I said. 'A hysterectomy?'

"No a prostatectomy," the doctor said kindly. He didn't realise I

was joking. He didn't realise that making a joke was the only way I knew how to deal with what he was suggesting. I'm not stupid; I just don't really want to have to deal with this, but I know I have to and I realise how important it is to know exactly what the range of treatments are that are available to me. So I ask all the right questions.

With that option put to the back of my mind the doctors explained all about external beam radiotherapy, brachytherapy, cryosurgery, hormone therapy, and, the latest thing, high intensity focused ultrasound.

"I'm not a baby," I joked at the last thing. Again they didn't seem to get it. But at least it tickled me.

With each treatment option that they told me about, the doctor went through a massive long list of facts about each one. Like how effective they are, what the risks are, how many people opt for that, how long it's been used for, what the benefits are, and, of course, a detailed description of exactly what they do. It's getting to a point now where I feel like I could give a lecture on it to medical students I know so much. It's such a tough decision though, and one that can't really be made for me. Some doctors told me to go for the radiotherapy, others said the prostatectomy, and another one suggested a combination. My head's spinning.

Luckily, they gave me a massive load of leaflets to take home with me so that I could sit down with my wife and go through things methodically.

Unfortunately, not all the options would be as effective in treating my prostate cancer as others. It's not the worst kind, it hasn't spread much, but they didn't catch it as early as they would have liked.

But right now, whether to freeze it, zap it or cut it out is still something I haven't completely decided on yet. But at least now I've gotten them to explain in as much detail as possible, I know what my options are. And having options makes me feel like I

have some control over this thing that otherwise makes me feel completely powerless most of the time. Everything else in my life I've always had a big say over. So even though I didn't choose to get this disease, at least I get to choose how I'm going to get rid of it. Or, I should say, how the doctors are going to get rid of it for me. I just know that I want to take an active role in my getting better. I know that staying positive, staying determined and asking the doctors a million questions is going to help.

And if that doesn't work, maybe I'll have the hysterectomy after all!

The Prostate Cancer Charity is the UK's leading charity working with people affected by prostate cancer. We fund research, provide support and information, and we campaign to improve the lives of men with prostate cancer. Our vision is a world where lives are no longer limited by prostate cancer.

We rely on charitable donations to continue this work. If you would like to make a donation, please call us on 020 8222 7666.



**Confidential Helpline
0800 074 8383**



**Online
prostate-cancer.org.uk**

Listen Up

In this booklet, African Caribbean men and women affected by prostate cancer reveal how the disease has touched their lives. We hope that by sharing these stories, we will enable people to re-examine their own attitudes to the disease and to play an active role in reducing cultural taboos and increasing awareness of prostate cancer.

We also hope that health care professionals will gain valuable insight into some of the issues facing African Caribbean communities.

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