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RICK KARLE



Rick and Jill Karle
with their children

A Survivor's Story

Education, early detection
lead to improved cure rates

BY LOYD MCINTOSH
PHOTO COURTESY OF RICK KARLE

T "You have cancer."

THREE WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE no one ever wants to hear. For many men, hearing those words is the first solid evidence that they're not 10 feet tall and bulletproof. However, being diagnosed with a male cancer like testicular or prostate cancer doesn't have to be seen as the end. For proof, all you need to do is turn on your television each evening.

FOX 6 sports anchor Rick Karle is himself a cancer survivor. It was 20 years ago while working for the CBS affiliate in Jacksonville, Fla., that Karle began experiencing pain in his lower

abdomen. After a few weeks of treatment with antibiotics failed to treat Karle's pain, his physician sent him to a urologist who found the source of the pain: testicular cancer.

"It surprised me because I was fairly healthy. I wasn't exactly a big-time jock, but I was pretty athletic," Karle said. "There is a little bit of a shock when you first hear it, but then you learn there are so many different

types of cancer and levels of cancer, and the success and cure rate is going up all of the time."

Forty years ago, a diagnosis of testicular cancer was essentially a death sentence. In 1967, men who developed testicular cancer had only a 10 percent chance of survival. By 1977, the survival rate had climbed only to 30 percent. However, thanks to early detection measures, research and new treatments, the survival rate grew rapidly to 80 to 90 percent by the time Karle was diagnosed in 1987.

For cancers that occur primarily in men, testicular cancer is now among the most rare and the most treatable. According to statistics provided by the American Cancer Society, a man's lifetime chance of developing testicular cancer is about one in 300, while the risk

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Early Detection is the Key to Fighting Prostate Cancer

TWENTY YEARS AFTER RICK KARLE'S DIAGNOSIS, the number of deaths from diseases like testicular cancer and prostate cancer has dramatically decreased, thanks to research, public awareness and vastly improved treatment options. In 2006, almost 235,000 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer, with a death rate of about 11 percent.

The American Cancer Society believes that health care professionals should offer the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal exam (DRE) yearly, beginning at age 50, to men who have at least a 10-year life expectancy. Men at high risk, such as African-Americans and men who have a first-degree relative (father, brother or son) diagnosed with prostate cancer at an early age (younger than age 65) should begin testing at age 45.

Men at even higher risk (because they have several first-degree relatives who had prostate cancer at an early age) could begin testing at age 40. Depending on the results of this initial test, further testing might not be needed until age 45.

Health care professionals should give men the chance to openly discuss the benefits and limitations of testing at yearly checkups. Men should actively take part in the discussion by learning about prostate cancer and the pros and cons of early detection and treatment of prostate cancer.

of dying from this cancer is one in 5,000. In 2006, slightly more than 8,200 men were diagnosed with testicular cancer in the United States, with fewer than 400 dying from the disease.

Still, being diagnosed with a highly curable cancer such as testicular cancer can be a hard pill to swallow, especially for a young man with his whole life in front of him. Karle had been married a little more than two years when he was diagnosed and in good physical condition. Still, Karle said the chemotherapy treatment was so aggressive that at times, he admits, "I thought that was going to kill me."

"The oncologist said 'The bad news is we're going to put you on chemo, and it's really going to hurt you,'" Karle said. "So they hit me really hard with chemo for three months. I dropped about 20 pounds, I lost my hair, and it just totally wiped me out."

In the middle of his chemotherapy treatment, Karle's story was featured in the local newspaper. A reader and testicular cancer survivor who read the story contacted Karle and gave him some advice he still remembers 20 years later.

"He called me up and said, 'I had this three years ago and it seemed like I was never going to get better,'" Karle recalled. "You feel lousy, you're throwing up all the time. It's brutal. But, right now I'm better, I feel great, and I have a kid."

Cancer free and the father of two, Karle regularly speaks to young men facing the disease. Knowing their fears, he gives the same advice he was given two decades ago that helped him through his ordeal.

"I tell them it's going to be lousy during the treatment, but just do it. You just have to do it," Karle said. "Do what your doctor says, take the treatment, and in a year or two from now you're going to feel great." ◊



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