



One Man's Journey with Cancer

How Dr. Russ Bell, a new prostate cancer monitoring project, and the Beckman Coulter Foundation have come together to create a remarkable path forward for cancer patients

“You could have cancer” are perhaps the four most dreaded words in the English language. Earlier this year, Dr. Russ Bell heard them for the first time. “In April, my doctor told me my PSA levels were rising,” says Russ, “and by June, I had a prostatectomy. It was that fast.”

PSA, or prostate specific antigen, is a protein produced by the prostate gland, and prostate disorders like cancer can increase the protein level in the blood. Russ' PSA levels meant a biopsy was needed. The biopsy confirmed cancer was present, so he and his doctor made the decision to remove his prostate.

Case closed, right? If you know Russ, you know this is just one part of the story of his unexpected journey with cancer.

Our paths crossed

Russ has been a part of Beckman Coulter for a long time. When he retired in 2009, he was senior vice president and chief scientific officer. He was brought into the company as president and CEO of Hybritech, Inc., when they were acquired in 1996. Hybritech was purchased mainly for their experience in monoclonal antibody and immunoassay development; in fact, their

PSA test (Tandem® PSA) was the first in vitro diagnostic test approved by the FDA for prostate cancer detection and management, and it became the basis for our current Hybritech® PSA product line.

Fast-forward to early 2009, when the University of California, Los Angeles' Department of Urology launched the Active Surveillance for Cancer of Prostate (ASCAP) Project. Founded by Dr. Leonard S. Marks, professor in UCLA's Department of Urology and one of the foremost urologists in the U.S., the project's aim is to identify men most likely to benefit from watchful waiting or “active surveillance” of prostate cancer rather than active intervention (i.e., surgery). Recent advances in medicine have shown that for men who harbor tiny, slow-growing lesions, active surveillance is often preferable to treatment with surgery or radiation, which may cause harmful side effects. The project is also unique in its emphasis on advanced prostate imaging with a new device used to track biopsy location and follow small prostate tumors in men entering the ASCAP Project.

Fast-forward again to late 2009, when the Beckman Coulter Foundation—the company's private charitable foundation that Russ was crucial in forming—learned of the ASCAP Project and decided its goals were aligned perfectly with the Foundation's mission of funding programs focused on healthcare-related research. So, in March 2010, the Foundation funded a grant of \$50,000 to support the work of a graduate student researcher assigned to the project, which allows the team to accelerate its research and increase its enrollment rate and data collection capabilities.

The new road ahead

When Russ learned of his rising PSA levels, it was a natural decision for him to get involved and become a part of this groundbreaking cancer monitoring project—and the irony of being involved in a project so near and dear to his Hybritech roots isn't lost on Russ. “I never thought I'd be taking an active part in a clinical study as a patient, let alone because of prostate cancer!” he says. “And because my case required follow-up, I ended up being one of the first patients in the ASCAP Project to have this new imaging technology used on me successfully.”

Now, Russ volunteers his time helping patients at the cancer treatment center in a hospital close to his home near Helena, Montana. “This journey has reminded me of some very valuable lessons,” shares Russ. “First and foremost, I encourage all men over 50 to get tested for prostate cancer—it's all about early detection. Don't put it off. It's very likely that the ASCAP Project will confirm that many men with prostate cancer will not need surgery or radiation.

“Also,” continues Russ, “everyone at Beckman Coulter should be proud of what you do every day to support healthcare advancements and delivery. The relationships that both Beckman Coulter and the Foundation have formed over the years with the best physicians and researchers in their fields continue to achieve amazing things.”

And how, might you ask, are things going with Russ' post-surgical monitoring? “The latest PSA results are in: Undetectable! Thank you for helping save my life!” ●

Did you know...?

Prostate cancer is the second most common form of cancer in men, with approximately 900,000 new cases diagnosed every year, worldwide.

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