



Fall 2024

# AWARENESS

## Prostate Cancer Support Toronto

### A DAUGHTER AND HER DAD

For Loreal Legare, Her father's prostate cancer journey will always be a source of inspiration

BY LOREAL LEGARE

I was 17 when my dad, Donald, was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer. He was only 53 years old.

At the time, I had no idea what that even meant – but it had the words “cancer” and “metastatic” in it and I knew that was bad. The thought of losing my dad, the most important person in my life, made my stomach turn – and it turned for years.

At 19, I went off to university to study international business, on my way to becoming a future HR manager for a big company – or so I thought. That Christmas, my dad had surgery to remove a golf ball sized tumor from his skull and was given a “you won't be alive next Christmas” comment from one of the doctors.

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Throughout the years, it was one thing after another – surgery and radiation for the skull tumour, in and out of the hospital for his gallbladder, then his pancreas, and then of course bone pain.

Despite all of that, the one thing that remained was his persistence and courage to try just about every possible natural option to help decrease the cancer spread. From juicing, to supplements, to exercise and mindfulness, to enemas and cleanses, he tried it all. His cancer remained steady for 4.5 years (which was a really big win), before the only other option was chemotherapy, which his heart didn't tolerate.



Watching my dad through the years inspired me. I struggled with my own digestive health issues in my sophomore year of undergrad, which led me down the “natural” rabbit hole my dad was on, and it prompted me to discover naturopathic medicine. We were always a very naturally focused family. I grew up on a pig, chicken and vegetable farm in Maine, so I knew how important nature and healthy eating was. I grew up taking tinctures, herbs and probiotics. But I also knew what overwork and stress were and how they affected the body.

Between sophomore and junior year, I worked at two law firms – now destined to be a lawyer due to my argumentative and organized personality. Ultimately, however, the thought of law school turned my stomach just about as much as the thought of losing my dad. I knew deep down that it wasn't the right fit for me. I wanted to do more, to be more.

At the beginning of senior year, I applied to the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine (CCNM) in Toronto – place I had never been. I was accepted a few months later and, within eight months, I moved to Toronto. It was June of 2021.

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**My dad wasn't doing well when I left, but he was proud and over-the-moon excited for me.**

**At the end of February 2022, I got "the call" from my mom asking me to come home. My dad was being discharged from the hospital and going home on hospice. I immediately called his doctor at the hospital. An incredibly nice and thoughtful woman explained to me that if she were in med school again and in my situation, she would leave right now and spend the rest of the time I had with my dad, and that school would wait.**

**I quickly packed my bag and left an hour after that phone call. I drove 12 hours and hugged my dad, told him I loved him for two weeks, and held his hand as he died. I had started school in September 2021. My dad died on March 7th, 2022 at the age of 59. I wrote two exams that week, and three the next. I failed every single one of them.**

**My dad lived until the day he died. Family members and those in our community got their PSA levels tested because of him. Prostate cancers were found early, found late, and prostates were removed because of him. It was easy for our family to ask "why him?" But he viewed it as "why not me?"**

**Cancer is an unfortunate reality these days. But what you do and how you live during that experience makes all the difference for yourself, your family and all of those around you.**

**I have since gotten my grades up and have made it to my final year at CCNM. I am currently on the Integrative Oncology Focus Shift at the Integrative Cancer Clinic and the Schad Naturopathic Clinic. I have a deep passion for not only cancer care but end-of-life care, grief and bereavement support. I volunteer with three local hospice organizations and am a trained death doula.**

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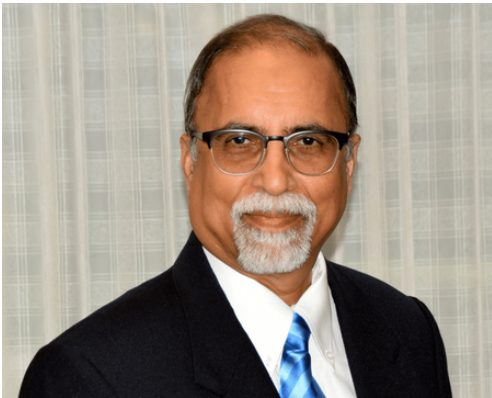
**I watched my dad die and a part of me died that day with him. But another part of me became more alive. He was an incredible person, an incredible dad, and his life and story will forever remain clenched in my heart.**

***Loreal Legare, 26, will graduate from CCNM in May 2025, when she plans to return to her home state of Maine to practise as a naturopathic doctor. She has generously volunteered to write for PCS Toronto's Awareness newsletter and hopes to contribute future articles on naturopathic oncology and men's health, among other topics.***

**“YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE AS IF YOU DIDN’T HAVE CANCER. YOU DON’T LET THE CANCER CONTROL YOUR LIFE”**

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR KEITH BRAGANZA**

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**How do you react when your loved one is sick?**

**If you are a parent, you worry, no matter your child’s age or how far away they are. If you are a sibling, you realize that someone you have experienced all your milestones with may not be there for tomorrow’s adventures. If you are their child, you think how you could ever live without your parent. If you are their spouse, you lean into the love that you have built together to support you.**

**This is what Keith Braganza’s family, and the families of other prostate cancer patients, have gone through. But of course, as a patient, no matter how favourable your diagnosis may be or how well you may process it, you are faced with your mortality. Everything that was once uniform and familiar is now irregular and new.**

**Keith’s response to his diagnosis in June 2015, surprised him. The news was delivered to him with his daughter by his side. “I reacted better than I thought,” he says. Maybe it was the need to be strong for her, along with the fact that he had been closely monitoring his PSA for almost a decade. But he remained steady when what is for many earth-shattering news was delivered to him. He had no qualms about telling those around him of his diagnosis. Even before he had entered the prostate cancer support arena, he was telling others to get checked, in the hopes that they would not be forced to buy a ticket to a game no one wants to play.**

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Treatment is not straightforward for many patients. For Keith, a radical prostatectomy that was supposed to leave him with an undetectable PSA, saw it go up 10 times from his initial reading post-treatment to his reading two months after. He then began radiation and hormone therapy treatment simultaneously. Throughout the process, he remained in good spirits. Often, when he told people about his cancer, they would respond with, "I'm praying for you." And while Keith is an agnostic, having those who believe in a higher power seeking healing on his behalf brought him comfort.

Keith found grounding not in a god, but in knowing. He actively sought out knowledge to answer the many questions that a diagnosis brings to the forefront. When he met with his medical team, he voiced every concern. "I did not get up until all of my questions were answered," he says. There were many books and articles read, webinars watched, and support group meetings attended. In fact, Keith was connected with the Toronto support group almost immediately, as their hospital volunteers had an office in the prostate centre at the hospital where Keith was diagnosed.

Keith's wife has played an important role in his journey. Like many partners of prostate cancer patients, a large share of the disease rested on her shoulders. As a cancer researcher herself, she was all too familiar with the way the disease behaves. So with Keith's research, his wife's, and the many friends who also work in the medical field, Keith had a fountain of knowledge that he could turn to that would gladly fill his cup.

When men experience sadness and fear, they are conditioned to ignore them. But feeling is what makes us human and separates us from other living things. The ability to feel and feel for others enables us to care. That being said, no one claims that being vulnerable is easy. Maybe a support group setting is too much, or you need more to complement it. In a case like that, if you call a phone number or click on a Zoom link, you can have a conversation with someone like Keith.

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**He will respond to your “Hello” with a cheerful “Hi” and you will tell him about your diagnosis, treatment, side effects, and any other physical or mental concern that you have regarding your prostate cancer journey. He will do the best he can to answer your questions and provide you with helpful resources.**

**Keith is a champion for one-on-one support. “I always wanted to do some kind of volunteering,” he reflects. So jokingly, Keith says that his diagnosis was fate because he can now help people in a way that is near to him.**

**Keith was one of the first peer navigators for a nationwide study on one-on-one peer support and provides the service in his local Toronto group. Recently, he finished the one-on-one training course provided by Prostate Cancer Foundation Canada (PCFC) and will begin to provide the service through PCFC, as well. Every week, Keith speaks to many men about their journeys. He is so involved in the service that he needs a binder to keep his many cases organized.**

**How then does one find empowerment over a disease that behaves erratically, without care for the sanctity of life? For Keith, you give the cancer the attention it deserves — and nothing more.**

**“You live your life as if you didn’t have cancer, you don’t let the cancer control your life,” he suggests.**

**And how does one do that? In addition to reading up on the disease and staying well-informed, they exercise. Keith puts many to shame with his fully equipped home gym. In addition, coping effectively means taking care of your mind. Keith meditated and kept his loved ones close.**

**Finally, many thriving survivors use their experience to help others. Keith is dedicated to his volunteering. During stormy weather, he suggests, when it seems that the rain won’t let up, you leave your house prepared with your umbrella and your rain boots, and you find peace in knowing that even if you do get wet, you did what you could.**

**Keith is dedicated to his volunteering for PCS Toronto and other organizations**

## RAISING THE BLUE AND WHITE FLAG FOR AWARENES!

On Sept. 1, 2024, some members of Prostate Cancer Support Toronto and their families attended a ceremony at Toronto City Hall to raise the PCS Toronto flag, acknowledging awareness of this cancer that affects one in eight Canadian men.

The following landmarks in the Toronto area were lit up in blue at different times during the month of September – also to promote awareness. They were Metro Convention Centre, the CN Tower, Ripley’s Aquarium and Vaughan City Hall.

Let us continue to spread the awareness!





## ANOTHER GREAT YEAR FOR PCS TORONTO'S SIGNATURE FATHER'S DAY FUNDRISE

By Denis Farbstein

On June 16, 2024, as part of the Father's Day Walk/ Run, two dozen of us assembled at Ashbridges Bay Park to first have some coffee and treats in the parking lot. Although a few ran the course, most leisurely walked and chatted along the boardwalk. The weather was ideal and the scenery was beautiful.

PCS Toronto collected \$11,813.18 and placed fifth in Canada for top teams. We appreciated all who were involved and contributed funds. In particular, many thanks go out to the Bacher contingency and Moshe Kaduri and his entourage for their participation in this worthwhile event.

We hope to top this next year.



## **HAVEN PROGRAM CAN PROVIDE A CRITICAL OPTION WHEN MEDICATION HELP IS NEEDED**

**By Alan Birch**

**Haven is a drug-agnostic patient support program designed to streamline access to take-home cancer medications from multiple manufacturers. Unlike traditional patient support programs that are limited to drugs from a single manufacturer, Haven provides comprehensive support for all cancer medications that a patient may be prescribed.**

**Most of Haven's patients have drug coverage, although it may not cover their full costs. The program has helped many Ontario patients with their Trillium Drug Program deductibles if they're under 65 years of age. If they're paying for their cancer drug with a private drug plan, Haven advisors help can provide support with co-pays. In rare cases, it has helped patients visiting Canada on a visa who have no coverage at all. Like a pharmacy, the program relies on drug sales to operate.**

**Our core services are delivered by Haven's oncology-trained pharmacy team, each with extensive experience from major cancer centres. Our mission is to simplify and expedite treatment access for both patients and their physicians.**

**Unfortunately, cancer patients often require multiple medications during their treatment, which traditionally involves navigating numerous patient support programs, completing multiple drug authorization forms, and dealing with other administrative hurdles. By offering support for a wide range of medications, Haven reduces the need for excessive paperwork and minimizes waiting times, ensuring patients get access to drug as quickly as possible.**

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**Additionally, Haven offers reimbursement navigation and financial assistance for patient co-pays and deductibles, striving to minimize out-of-pocket expenses for medications. Our Drug Access Navigators, with years of experience in cancer care under their belts, assist with the initiation of treatment and ensure smooth access to necessary drugs.**



**Our support extends to detailed drug counselling from our oncology pharmacists, follow-up calls to monitor patient progress, medication history reviews, and drug-drug interaction checks to ensure a safe start to treatment. For certain medications that may cause hypertension, we also provide free blood pressure monitors.**

**As an extension of your primary care team, Haven maintains close communication with your healthcare providers, alleviating their administrative burdens so they can focus more on patient care. Our goal is to simplify the complexities of cancer medication management, allowing you to concentrate on what matters most to you.**

**Typically, a physician will enrol their patient in Haven, but you can also self-enrol by emailing:**

**haven@sentrex.com**

**or calling: 1-866-352-3211.**

***Alan Birch is Associate Director, Provider Solutions for Markham, Ont.-based Sentrex Health Solutions, which operates the Haven program.***

## PROSTATE CANCER FOUNDATION CANADA ANNOUNCES NEW LEADERSHIP



**Dr. Abby Collier has taken over as executive director of the Surrey, B.C.-based Prostate Cancer Foundation Canada (PCFC) effective Aug. 1, 2024. PCFC is PCS Toronto's parent organization.**

**Former executive director Leah Lariviere has retired after dedicating the last 25 years of her career to improving the lives of those affected by prostate cancer.**

**Dr. Collier joins PCFC from the University of British Columbia (UBC), where she began serving as a member of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences in 2013. A professor of drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics, Dr. Collier was also the founding director of UBC's Bachelor of Pharmaceutical Sciences undergraduate degree program. Her research has been in the fields of human and environmental toxicology, pregnancy and pediatrics, and prostate cancer, with a focus on improving drug/chemical safety and efficacy and on informing drug development in academia and industry.**

**Dr. Collier has more than a decade of strategic leadership experience, including involvement in fundraising and donor relations. She has helped secure multi-million-dollar investments in equipment, infrastructure and research grants, and has been involved in policy advisories to governments in Canada and the United States. She has also been an active volunteer with Prostate Cancer Foundation Canada (previously Prostate Cancer Foundation British Columbia) for more than 10 years.**

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**“One of the things I've enjoyed most over my career is advocating for what I believe in, whether that's with corporate or individual donors, decision makers in the medical community and in government, scientists and medical practitioners, or with patients and their families,” said Dr. Collier.**

**“I now get to do that leading an organization I've been involved with for more than a decade,” she added. “I'm eager to build upon Leah's rich legacy of support and advocacy for those whose lives are impacted by prostate cancer.”**

**Dr. Collier's appointment comes at a time when PCFC continues to grow as a national organization dedicated to providing awareness, support, education, advocacy and research to men, their families, carers and wider communities facing prostate cancer.**

**“The board owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Leah for all she has done to build PCFC into the organization it is today,” said Peter Fairey, PCFC's board chairman. “We are also delighted to welcome Dr. Collier as our new executive director.”**

**“The board is confident in Abby's vision for the continued expansion of the foundation's offerings across Canada – from funding research, to strengthening provincial partnerships and collaborations, to the delivery of more programs and support for patients and their families at every step on their journeys with this treatable cancer,” he added.**

**Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian men, with one in eight men expected to be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetimes. With early diagnosis, prostate cancer can be curable. However, a poll conducted by PCFC in 2023 showed that many men delay being tested, and this is a contributing factor in why one in 29 men diagnosed with prostate cancer will lose their lives.**

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**“We see 23,000 new prostate cancer diagnoses every year, and that number will not shrink as Canada’s population ages,” said Lariviere. “The work PCFC does is critical, and I am so proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish so far. What started as a phone helpline in the late 1990s is today funding research, delivering 360-degree support services nationally, and providing hope to thousands of Canadian men and their families. It has been a privilege to lead these efforts and I am excited to see how the organization evolves under Abby’s leadership.”**

## **NIAGARA FALLS MPP RENEWS CALL FOR OHIP COVERAGE FOR PSA TESTING**

**For Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, NDP MPP Wayne Gates called on the Ford government to pass his motion to have OHIP cover prostate-specific antigen testing for early detection of prostate cancer when referred by a healthcare provider.**



**“We know that 1 in 8 men in Canada will be diagnosed with prostate cancer over the course of their lifetime,” said Gates. “This year alone, it is estimated that 5,000 men will lose their lives to this devastating disease. But we also know that when prostate cancer is detected early, nearly 100 per cent of men with the disease will survive five years or longer.”**

**MPP Gates previously introduced his motion in 2019, 2020 and 2023. The motion would extend OHIP coverage for the PSA test when referred by a healthcare provider. Currently, eight other provinces cover the test.**

**Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Canadian men and has disproportionate impacts among Black men, including those of African or Caribbean ancestry, and those with a family history. In 2024, an estimated 27,900 men in Canada, and 10,500 men in Ontario, are expected to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and 5,000 men are expected to die of the disease.**

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**The motion is supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, and Gates was joined at a Queen's Park press conference by Dr. Stuart Edmonds from the Canadian Cancer Society and three patient advocates living with prostate cancer, including Anthony Henry from the Walnut Foundation, Dr. Anthony Dixon, an emergency room physician in Chatham-Kent, and Pete Ward a constituent in Gates's riding.**

**"This is a common-sense, simple solution that will save our province millions of dollars, and more importantly, save lives," said Gates. "Let's come together across party lines and do the right thing by passing this motion. I'm calling on the government and all parties to come together to support it."**

*(Reprinted from NDP news release)*