

Spirituality in Men with Advanced Prostate Cancer

PhD Dissertation – Laurence Lepherd

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Personal note

I would be very pleased to hear from any men who are interested in this research, and particularly, any who might like to participate. Please feel free to send an email to: lepherd@usq.edu.au, or, phone 07 4631 5459, or contact me on my mobile 0418192517.

Laurie Lepherd

The research

It is the aim of this study to explore the spiritual dimensions of men with advanced prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in Australia (Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, 2008, p. 2). It is estimated that in Queensland, and in Australia as a whole, 1 in 5 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer before the age of 85. In Queensland, the life-time risk of a man dying from prostate cancer is 1 in 22. Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of death through cancer of men in Queensland. It makes up 13% of all male cancer deaths. The average length of survival after men have been diagnosed with prostate cancer is 10 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007; Queensland Cancer Registry, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, advanced prostate cancer refers to the condition existing when the cancer has become non-localised by spreading beyond the prostate gland to other parts of the pelvic area, or has metastasised to other parts of the body (National Cancer Institute, 2008).

With such a significant prevalence of this illness in our society, it is important to become more aware of the need for men to receive support during the stressful times of their illness, especially where, in prostate cancer, the time from testing and diagnosis through to death can be long. This support can be provided through various psychosocial interventions. One element of support can be through men calling on their spirituality.

Goddard describes spirituality as “a universal human dimension which inheres every individual, whether religious, humanist, hedonist or atheist.” (1995, p. 809)

Important questions relating to spirituality that it is anticipated will be answered through this research, are:

- What is its role in men who have reached an advanced phase in their cancer journey?
- How does a man cope spiritually with this often slow progression of the illness?
- Are there common aspects of spirituality in men with advanced prostate cancer, even though they may have different life experiences, and live in a variety of different circumstances?

By studying men with advanced cancer and recording their spiritually related experiences during their journey, and then analysing their reflections of this journey, it is anticipated that information will be available to assist them in their well-being and their quality of life as they progress through the latter and stressful stages of prostate cancer. This information might be used by health professionals in a variety of disciplines, including pastoral care – to understand more fully the way a man in this condition may use and benefit from his spirituality.

References

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About the researcher

After retiring from fulltime work at USQ in 2000, Laurie trained as a pastoral carer. He contracted cancer (and was subsequently cleared), and works as a volunteer in the Toowoomba Hospital, in recent years on the chemotherapy ward. He is also a presenter in the Community Education Program for Cancer Council Queensland and works as a volunteer in that organisation's Cancer Connect Program.
