

The day I told my kids: Dad's got the fight of his life on his hands

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"YOU'VE got a year, maybe 18 months to live."

It's a sentence no father wants to hear.

There was no sugar coating the situation. At 54, I was diagnosed with one of the most aggressive prostate cancers you can have. If I hadn't been sitting down, the doctor's words might have knocked me off my feet.

With two teenage boys, I'd become a statistic. I was one of the 49 men diagnosed in Australia every day.

I certainly didn't want to be one of the nine men who die every day.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in Australian men, claiming the lives of more than 3300 of us each year. And as an ambassador for the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia (PCFA), I know how low awareness levels are.

Maybe because so often it strikes out of nowhere. Like many men, I had no warning signs, no symptoms. I was in the prime of my life. Hearing the news felt like being hit by a truck. I was shocked.

There are a lot of myths about prostate

cancer. One of them is that it's an old man's disease. I'm here to tell you - it's not.

One of the other myths is that getting tested for prostate cancer involves a rubber glove. It's a myth that does a lot of damage and deters men from getting checked.

Let me be clear, fellas - the screening test for prostate cancer is *just a blood test*.

I went through what many men go through. I thought about not telling anyone. Because how many of us actually know what our prostate does?

Would this impact my career, my status, my relationships and sex life?

Working as a general manager at a high level in a thriving Australian auto industry, prior to being diagnosed I spent very little of my time talking to my team and company about men's health. The day I got my diagnosis, that all changed for me, and it has to change for all of us if we want to drive survival forward.

It's a silent killer, with thousands of Australian men at risk because of their family history, unaware they're sitting on a ticking time bomb. Having a direct family member diagnosed with prostate cancer doubles a man's risk of being diagnosed, while having two or more close family members impacted carries a fivefold increase.



Remember - the test for prostate cancer is just a blood test. **Picture: Shutterstock**

Telling my sons Christian and Harry wasn't easy. I told them that, hopefully, I'd be OK. But I couldn't guarantee it. That's what's tough about prostate cancer.

After a frank discussion with my doctor, I decided to undergo a radical prostatectomy.

I didn't have time to worry about what it might mean for erectile dysfunction or incontinence - that stuff is inconsequential when you are six feet under.

My radical prostatectomy wasn't a walk in the park, I'll say that. But I have been one of the lucky ones. Lucky to be in a major capital city, to have a supportive family, to work with a company that puts people first.

I was also lucky to have the support of a PCFA prostate cancer specialist nurse, who had expert knowledge about treatment and side-effect management.

One thing I've learned is that no two prostate cancers are the same. What worked for me won't necessarily work for all men, which is why we need to do everything we can to empower men in the process.

So far I'm in the clear, and at no point have I had to walk this path alone - although many other men do. That's why I stepped up to be an ambassador in PCFA's "Walk for Him" event for Men's Health Week.

I'm walking 49,000 steps for the 49 men who are diagnosed every day, just like I was - and for my two sons who have double the risk of diagnosis just because I'm their dad.

▮ Rob Smith is a PCFA Tyrepower Walk for Him ambassador. walkforhim.org.au

▮ Men's Health Week runs from June 13-19