



Women on men's health and prostate cancer

There is consensus that overall, compared to men, women are more competent in health matters and more likely to engage health care services. An array of factors may underpin this gender-health divide. For example, many women use reproductive health care services early on in their lives, and through regular contact they can become accustomed as well as orientated to self-health and professional service providers. Recognizing these gendered patterns of health we interviewed 23 women to solicit their opinions about men's health practices at home and at prostate cancer support groups.

Men need to be managed

Most women managed their partner's diet, and for most participants their role in choosing and preparing healthy meals was increased following prostate cancer. Many women suggested that men had little insight, and in some cases no interest, for knowing about diet. As a 73-year-old woman suggested it was really just a matter of preparing and serving the meals she thought were most healthy:

I think probably for a bunch of reasons we've been getting on to the really healthy diet and not a lot of meat, piles and piles of vegetables. And it just gets to be a habit; it's what you, well what I prefer. And (husband) is easy to cook for. You know, he eats anything...Like I used to say when I was first starting this, he really doesn't notice how much less meat we're eating.

This extended to other aspects of looking after men's health whereby women were quick to assert that the health and safety of men ultimately resided with his partner. As a 64-year-old woman explained:

Last night there was a lady saying that her husband is lifting a television. Of course, they were all over her. She is responsible for trying to keep him from lifting. I mean it's up to her to get in there. Do you realize how serious this is? I mean we didn't pick on her, you know, a couple said, "Hey you got to watch him." And another woman said that she was having the same trouble with her husband but she makes sure that there is somebody watching him all the time. These are the kind of things, we have to take care of that.

Expanding manly options

In terms of the men's interactions at the PCSGs most women were surprised by how the men spoke openly about their prostate cancer and ordinarily private issues including urinary incontinence and erectile dysfunction. Many women suggested connecting with other men who had similar issues helped them to adjust to those changes.