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I have a saying that says, "Win the day." It's like when I get up every morning, "Let's win the day," because you're not guaranteed another day, but you can do the best you can with the one that you have, whether that's family, whether that's individually, whatever. You go out and you try to make a difference in this world.

Diane Mulligan:

Advances in lung cancer treatments over the last few years have made it possible to live with lung cancer for years after diagnosis. And we are so excited to be able to share insights and conversations with so many people living with lung cancer. But one thing we've noticed, so many of the stories we share are from women, but not today. I'm Diane Mulligan.

Sarah Beatty:

And I'm Sarah Beatty. Today on the Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast, we hear from the guys about living with lung cancer. They share their experiences so honestly, and openly thanks to a wonderful conversation with our colleague, Jordan Sherman.

Jordan Sherman:

I am so excited to join you today. These guys are dedicated husbands and dads who are working hard as patient advocates, connecting with other guys diagnosed with lung cancer. Today, they share with us how their relationships with their children inspire them and give them perspective, as they adjust to living with lung cancer. Get ready for a great conversation.

Diane Mulligan:

Lung cancer is a tough topic. It's a disease that affects patients, families, friends, coworkers, but first it's a disease that affects people. The Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast brings you stories about people living, truly living with lung cancer, the researchers dedicated to finding new breakthrough treatments, and others who are working to bring hope into the lung cancer experience.

Sarah Beatty:

We've got a special guest with us on the Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast today. To share insights from an incredible conversation with guys who are connected by the dedication to their families, their contributions to work and community, and their shared experience of living with lung cancer.

Diane Mulligan:

That's right. We're joined by our colleague, Jordan Sherman. Jordan, you got to be that proverbial fly on the wall for an incredibly funny, honest and open conversation with an amazing group of men, who are part of a group of LCFA patient advocates. What'd you learn from this group of guys?

Jordan Sherman:

That's right. I learned that guys do want and need to share their feelings about the challenges of living with lung cancer. They talked about the strength they draw from the most fundamental relationships in their lives, especially these guys, Frank McKenna, A.J. Patel and James Hiter. All guys living with lung cancer who are first and foremost, husbands and fathers. They talked about sharing their lung cancer diagnosis with their kids. And how those relationships help to change their perception of being diagnosed with lung cancer.

Frank McKenna:

Right at the time I was diagnosed, my car's transmission died. And to fix the transmission, cost more than what the car was worth. And my two sons came to me and said, "We've always wanted to buy you a car and this is the time to do it. We want to buy you a new car and go out." My one son lived in California, he came home. My other son lived with me. They got together and said, "Well, we're going to buy you a car. We'll take you around. Get what you want." My thought at the time was, "Well, I'm going to get something that my wife likes because I'm not going to be around here that long. So she's going to take over the car. So let me get something that she likes." And she said, "No way in heck are you doing that. You get what you want because you're not going anywhere."

Frank McKenna:

And my sons and I went out, we got a car that I just had the 90,000 miles service on. So it's been almost five years. And that was the best advice I got, live your life. Don't say, "Oh, you may not be here. You may not do this." And my sons were so instrumental in saying, "This is what we've always wanted to do for you." And they didn't know how much time they would have to do these things, but they did them from the beginning. And that just helped propel through the whole journey of ... everybody's saying, "You're not going anywhere. You're going to stay here. You're going to fight this. And you're going to get what you want, because this is what you need to do." They came together, which I couldn't believe at the time, but it was just so inspiring to me to know that I had that effect on them. That they wanted to give back to me and make their dreams and wishes come true with the little time that we had. And here we are five years later and I have no plans on going anywhere.

Diane Mulligan:

Okay, Jordan, it's clear. This is going to be a three tissue episode. You really got into some vulnerable territory in this discussion.

Jordan Sherman:

We absolutely did. And talking about lung cancer, there's no way around tough conversations, but A.J. Patel talks about how communicating honestly about these issues with his kids, helps them work through their own feelings about his diagnosis.

A.J. Patel:

As a guy, I'm more sensitive to things. I'm now more open to family members and others, talking to them and sharing my emotions and feelings. Something which are kind of reserved and never really talked about because I thought, "Hey, well I am supposed to be the head of household. What am I going

to do being vulnerable?" But now I realize that vulnerability leads to discussions and dialogues, and it's not necessarily always an outcome that will, "Now, we feel better." As a guy, if you don't share these emotions and concerns with your loved ones, maybe your spouse, maybe your partner, maybe your children, that other outer family members, they struggle because they can't help.

Sarah Beatty:

That's what's so striking about this conversation. These guys talk about how living with lung cancer actually deepens their relationships with their kids.

Jordan Sherman:

That's what James says. His kids are a little bit older, both out of college and starting their own lives. And he says, "Lung cancer makes them work harder to maintain an emotional connection despite their physical distance."

James Hiter:

It's definitely brought us closer together. I think we were already really tight. We had a great relationship with both of my children because I traveled so much for work. We already had a pattern of talking on the phone, basically every day. When they went off to college, we curtailed that a little, but I still talk to them a lot more than my friends who had kids off to college. And with the diagnosis, kind of adding a sense of ... I don't know if this is a sense of urgency or just a sense of ... "This is important." And while we don't talk about it, it's not something any of us will dwell about. It's something that I know they know, and that we're able to enjoy the time that we have and make the most of that.

James Hiter:

And my son is actually on his way, he's moving to Seattle and this was a tough move. I mean, my son is one of my best friends in the whole wide world, and he's actually on a cross country adventure right now, climbing mountains in the Rockies, on his way out to move permanently to Seattle. It was tough when he first told me, that was his plan. But both of us, I think, came to the realization that our relationship's solid and it can continue to be solid, even with the entire continental United States between us. With the ability to travel and stay connected and really not feel like we're losing a lot, even though it's tough when your children move away regardless of the diagnosis. But especially, when you feel like your days might be a little bit more limited than they would be otherwise, perhaps.

Diane Mulligan:

Maintaining that connection as your kids grow and take flight. I know how important that is. Jordan. We hear from the patient advocates about how the parent child relationship sometimes changes after a diagnosis.

Jordan Sherman:

That's something Frank McKenna brought up as he talks about how he and his oldest son settled into a different type of conversation after his diagnosis.

Frank McKenna:

So we kind of had that mature relationship, but it kind of was a man to man good relationship because it wasn't as much father-son as it was two men that went through a lot together and grew up together and everything like that. So it seemed like it was a really good adult relationship that you shared or you didn't talk about, "The fear. What are the statistics? How long do I have to live?" different things like that. It was just like, "These are the things we're going to do. We're going to continue to go to concerts. We're going to continue to go to events together. We're going to continue to do things."

Frank McKenna:

And in fact, my son who had lived at home with me when I was diagnosed is now married. He's going to have a family of his own. And it's just that, you kind of grew through that together and just had that, "We're in this. We're going to live." As A.J. say, "You're not promised tomorrow, but if you have today, let's live today." And you know I have a saying that says, "Win the day." It's like, when I get up every morning, "Let's win the day," because you're not guaranteed another day. But you can do the best you can with the weapons you have, whether that's family, whether that's individually, whatever. You go out and you try to make a difference in this world. And you're not guaranteed anything, but if you're guaranteed right now, make a difference right now.

Sarah Beatty:

Frank brings up making a difference. That's the reason all three of these guys agreed to share their very personal stories.

Jordan Sherman:

Absolutely. That's something I heard from all of them. Including A.J. Patel, whose daughters are a bit younger. He takes a philosophical approach to sharing his experience of living with lung cancer. As part of his lung cancer patient advocacy work, both with his kids and with newly diagnosed patients.

A.J. Patel:

But if you've got more older children, it's really important for people like me to open up to the children and say, "Hey, this is life." And try to work through the fundamental philosophy of life, which is, "We're born, we're going to pass away." The order of business is typically, the older you are the sooner you will pass away. And the younger generation will fill in, but life doesn't always give you that opportunity. And so these are beautiful opportunities to talk to children, talk to older children, show them that, "Yes, this is a very dangerous disease and there's no cure for it presently." But you know we've turned a corner, look at each one of us, we've been diagnosed so many years ago. When I was diagnosed I was told, "You probably won't survive more than six months." And you know, here I am eight years later.

A.J. Patel:

And you know, I don't care about, whether I survive for tomorrow or not. I only care about here right now and whatever. When I'm here right now, I'll do whatever I want to do, which is advocate for lung cancer, advocate for research, do my own work and live a life. And if tomorrow the sun rises and I happen to be in it, hopefully it's going to be a beautiful day. Smile, take a deep breath and say, "What



else can we do today?" And I think those are the important traits that I've learned in the eight year journey. From a guy's side.

Jordan Sherman:

I can tell you both. This was a really special conversation for me to have with Frank, A.J. And James, as they shared how their kids help motivate them to learn, how to live with lung cancer sometimes in unexpected ways.

Diane Mulligan:

Thank you so much for these insights, Jordan, and you're not done yet.

Sarah Beatty:

Nope. Up next, a conversation with LCFA's Executive Director on why this conversation is so important to him personally.

Diane Mulligan:

Are you enjoying the Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast, consider making a donation to help LCFA produce this resource for patients or anyone seeking answers, hope, and access to updated treatment information, scientific investigation and clinical trials. Just text LCF America to 41444 to join in this important fight.

Diane Mulligan:

LCFA was founded by three people whose lives are affected by lung cancer. LCFA executive director Jim Baranski also has a personal connection.

Sarah Beatty:

Jim is an expert at efficiently steering LCFA to achieve its mission of funding cutting edge research and outreach to people affected by lung cancer. But he also has his own lung cancer story.

Jordan Sherman:

That's right. He understands the experience of so many families affected by the leading cancer killer in the United States. And the need for both men and women to be involved in the lung cancer patient advocacy.

Jordan Sherman:

Jim, we talk about terms like lung cancer, patient advocacy, and these all sounds so clinical. But what is patient advocacy and why does LCFA work so hard to support patient advocates in their stories?

Jim Baranski:

Yeah, that's a big question. For years and years, lung cancer has not really had many heroes. Mainly because, if you've been diagnosed with lung cancer, your chances of living a long life were pretty

abysmal. So because of that, living with lung cancer really was kind of preparing for the end. And it really hasn't been until ... really the last decade where we have now tools in the toolbox, we have treatments. Thanks to research that are enabling and empowering lung cancer patients to truly live with lung cancer and enjoy their lives. So we now have heroes and champions in lung cancer. And yeah, so for us to advocate and champion for those patients, but also to continue research, we believe is critical.

Jordan Sherman:

So this really is the first time where ... as you pointed out just a second ago, in the last decade that these folks who are living with lung cancer, get a chance to kind of tell their story, right?

Jim Baranski:

Yeah, exactly. And when you think about other diseases, other cancers ... No disease is a good disease, no cancer is a good cancer. But to be able to have people living with their condition and being able to be a champion of what research has provided and enabled them is just so valuable and so important. And it provides hope to those living with those conditions. And in our case with lung cancer.

Jordan Sherman:

You and I are both sports fans. When we get together ... I mean, geez, the last time would have been the Patient Advocate workshop two years ago. But we were chatting whether ... because your sailor, I'm a meteorologist, talking Wisconsin Badgers football. Of course, we couldn't have a conversation about that. But you know, a lot of the guys stuff that we talk about isn't necessarily the touchy feely kind of stuff. It's not, what we're feeling inside or what we're scared of, what we hope for. It's just not usually what we do. So how does a conversation like this one, hopefully change the game for guys living with lung cancer?

Jim Baranski:

Yeah. So you're absolutely right, Jordan. Guys don't like to talk about themselves when it comes to issues that can be very personal, very sensitive, and oftentimes things that frighten us. We're best known for, grin and bear it, and if it doesn't hurt, don't fix it. This podcast where guys have a place that's safe to talk to one another and share with one another their experiences living with lung cancer, we hope will be a bit magical. And also hopefully allow those listening to the podcast that, "You know what, it's okay to let your guard down." In fact, when you get done having the conversation and sharing with another man, what's really going on in your life, chances are you're going to come out the other side stronger. So yeah, that's our hope.

Jordan Sherman:

Another part of living with lung cancer or sharing a life with somebody who's living with lung cancer is how prevalent it is, but how little it's talked about. So how does your background help you in your work as LCFA's Executive Director?

Jim Baranski:



Yeah, I guess I've witnessed firsthand the stigma that so often is associated with lung cancer. And what I mean by that is, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer and died shortly after. He was diagnosed in late 2006, and in 2007 he had passed away. And he had small cell lung cancer, which is known to be a very, very aggressive cancer. And so yeah, I saw firsthand the stigma that was...

Jim Baranski:

There was a point where I wouldn't even share with other people ... kind of going back to the guy thing, that my father was diagnosed with lung cancer, because the first question that they would ask me is, "Oh, did your dad smoke?" That always came even before they'd asked, "Oh, well, how old is he?" You know everybody always asks that one. So yeah, I had a firsthand look at what that stigma can do, not only to the patient, but also to the family and the caregivers supporting that patient. And again, this was back in 2007 and a lot has changed thankfully since then. Getting back to your question. That was what introduced me into this whole world of lung cancer and some of the challenges and barriers that face it.

Diane Mulligan:

Jordan, we're so glad you joined us for today's episode, and we're so grateful. These dads were open to sharing their stories about how they're connecting with their kids as they learn to live with lung cancer.

Jordan Sherman:

It was my pleasure. And I hope the conversation inspires other guys living with lung cancer to get in touch with a patient advocate or become one themselves.

Sarah Beatty:

And thank you to Frank McKenna, A.J. Patel, James Hiter, and LCFA Executive Director Jim Baranski, for joining us today on the Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast. Join us again next time.

Diane Mulligan:

Make sure to subscribe to the Hope With Answers: Living With Lung Cancer Podcast, you'll be notified every time a new episode is available. So visit us online at [lcfamerica.org](http://lcfamerica.org), where you can find more information about the latest in lung cancer research, new treatments, and more. You can also join the conversation with LCFA on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.