

# LOCAL

## A doctor's cancer journey

### It cost him \$100,000 — but it saved his life

BY DENISE DAVY

**BURLINGTON** ♦ When a Burlington doctor discovered he had prostate cancer, he went in search of the best medical care money could buy.

It took him to the United States and cost him \$100,000, but balanced against his chances of survival if he'd stayed in Canada, it was an easy decision.

Dr. Tom Johnson, 54, works at Halton Family Health Care and was healthy and fit, despite his tedious 75-hour work week.

When he was diagnosed with prostate cancer last April, he had reason to be concerned.

Mortality from prostate cancer is high — on average, 83 Canadian men die of prostate cancer every week. His test results put him in the high risk category.

Normal PSA (prostate specific antigen) results for prostate cancer are between zero and four, with 20 considered high. His PSA was 49.

If he combined his PSA with other scores, including another test that showed nine out of 10 of his biopsies were positive for cancer, he had less than a 5 per cent chance of a cure.

"I thought, oh my God, I'm going to die," said Johnson, who is married with four children.

"I saw the word death written across my face."

After consulting a urologist, he was told the only option was to have surgery to have his prostate removed.

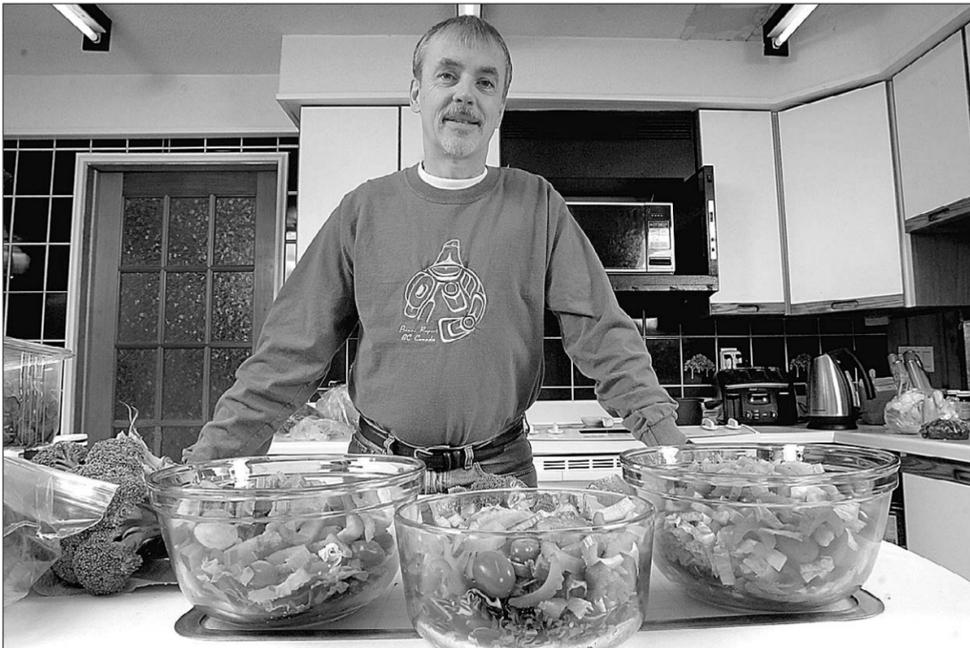
He started taking Zoladex, a hormone treatment that blocks the testosterone that feeds the cancer and was booked for surgery at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto in mid-May.

While waiting for surgery, he read a book called Prostate Cancer — A Survival Guide. It mentioned a centre in Sarasota, Fla., called the Dattoli Clinic.

It was a fork in the road and the first of many eye-opening discoveries he happened across in his cancer journey.

The clinic treats high-risk prostate cancer patients by using an external beam radiation followed by brachytherapy or seed implants.

The treatment involves the implantation of small titanium radioactive "seeds" into the tumour. As the seeds release radiation, the



KAZ NOVAK, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

**When Dr. Tom Johnson was diagnosed with prostate cancer last year, he saw 'the word death written across' his face. He found a clinic in Sarasota, Fla., that treated high-risk patients. The cost to him was \$100,000.**

tumour shrinks and dies.

Unlike surgery, the procedure did not carry a high risk of erectile dysfunction and urinary incontinence.

Johnson was impressed with the clinic's 15-year longitudinal study, which showed a 71 per cent survival rate among high-risk patients.

"When I saw that, I flipped through the roof," said Johnson.

"Medically it all made sense to me and they had studies to show their success rate."

He knew similar procedures were being done at Princess Margaret, but was surprised to discover they were only performed together on low-risk patients.

OHIP refused to cover the costs on the grounds that the same procedure was available in Canada, a point Johnson refuted, but decided not to fight because of the "emotional wear and tear."

He estimates the trip cost around \$100,000, with \$25,000 of that for hotel and living costs.

"I needed to put my energy into fighting the cancer," said Johnson.

Fighting the cancer took him into another arena. He'd had many chats with his daughter, Kelly, about healthy eating as she was a recent graduate of the Institute for Holistic Nutrition in Toronto.

### Out-of-country health care

The following is the number of people in Hamilton and Burlington who went out of country for health-care treatment last year:

- Five for cardiac care
  - 35 for cancer care
  - 234 for DNA analysis
  - Five for eating disorders/psychiatric disorders/substance abuse
  - 35 for gastric bypass
  - Eight others (includes cases for which treatment was not immediately available in Ontario)
  - 16 people were denied funding for health services last year.
- Ministry of Health

turmeric and freshly chopped garlic and onion.

Once back from his two months of treatments in Florida, Johnson made more changes in his life.

He cut back his work week to 35 hours and cut out night hours.

Perhaps most important, says Johnson, is that he changed his attitude about life.

"I was grateful to be alive," said Johnson, adding the experience brought him closer to his family.

His cancer journey also taught him that people need to be their own advocates for cancer care.

What he learned most and what he tries to pass along to others is something he read in seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong's book on surviving testicular cancer:

Find the best cancer doctor you can and do everything he or she says.

"It was one of the most inspirational things I read and I hung onto it," said Johnson.

"Find the best doctor you can. And I would add to that to find the best holistic nutritionist you can and do everything they say."

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He decided to fight his cancer through healthier eating and set up a meeting with holistic nutritionist Darko Prce.

Within a week, Johnson was on a strict diet that eliminated dairy, wheat and sugar from his meals.

His daily eating regimen now includes two salads topped with

### Top stories @ thespec.com

Most popular stories for the week of March 30 to April 5

1. They lead Steeltown's six-figure parade
2. Former Dunnville deputy mayor meant to kill wife: police
3. Crash evidence didn't add up
4. Cyclist dies after being struck by truck
5. Father kills his three children in hotel room
6. Big toy ahoy! Hortons man has \$30m boat
7. Husband meant to kill wife: police
8. Man tumbles 60m into gorge
9. Man charged with trying to run down police officer
10. Sex trade worker found dead



**A feature in Saturday's Spec about the growing deer population in Hamilton is creating a buzz. Go to thespec.com to vote in our poll and join the discussion.**

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In an effort to simplify our Monthly Credit Card Billing process, for those subscribers that have chosen this billing option, effective May 1, 2008, all monthly credit card subscribers will be billed on the FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH.

This change is in response to customer feedback and it will allow you to easily recognize reductions for any vacation or other credits on your account.

Your first billing on the new schedule (May 3) will reflect the monthly charge for May less any May deliveries covered by your previous billing. After that, charges will revert to your regular monthly rate on the first Saturday of each month, minus any credits owing.

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Sunday

Pick 3: 2 4 7. Pick 4: 2 2 5 5.

Keno: 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 30, 50, 54, 59, 60, 63, 64.  
Encore: 4834016.

Saturday

Lotto 6/49: 16, 18, 21, 27, 36, 43.  
Bonus: 44. Encore: 4 8 9 6 0 3 0.

Ontario 49: 10, 19, 22, 35, 39, 49.  
Bonus: 2.

Lottario: 1, 3, 4, 5, 30, 35. Bonus: 23.  
Early Bird: 5, 33, 35, 38.

Keno: 1, 10, 14, 18, 21, 22, 24, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38, 42, 43, 46, 53, 60, 65, 68, 70.

### Last week's wrapup

Keno, Apr. 4: 3, 6, 10, 18, 21, 26, 27, 32, 41, 48, 52, 53, 55, 57, 61, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69.

Lotto Super 7, Apr. 4: 8, 15, 25, 27, 31, 37, 43. Bonus: 19. Encore: 301454 0.

Pick 3: Sun. 734, Mon. 690, Tue. 940, Wed. 204, Thu. 854, Fri. 055, Sat. 244.

Pick 4: Sun. 4987, Mon. 8159, Tue. 4706, Wed. 1049, Thu. 9562, Fri. 4656, Sat. 4070.

Payday, Apr. 3: 11, 18, 21, 62.

Lotto 6/49, Apr. 2: 2, 5, 8, 20, 21, 33.  
Bonus: 11. Encore: 77 5 7 3 1 4.

Ontario 49, Apr. 2: 9, 17, 25, 29, 42, 43. Bonus: 4.

Lotto 6/49, Mar. 29: 4, 7, 10, 12, 26, 33. Bonus: 24. Encore: 3 0 9 1 1 6 1.

Ontario 49, Mar. 29: 2, 4, 19, 21, 32, 41. Bonus: 12.

Lottario, Mar. 29: 1, 6, 26, 31, 41, 42.  
Bonus: 43. Early Bird: 22, 31, 39, 42.

**Please note:** In the event of any discrepancy between this list and the official winning numbers, the latter shall prevail.

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