

Book Review

Invasion of the Prostate Snatchers

By Ralph Blum and Mark Scholz, M.D.

I thought a better title would be *Diary of a Wimpy Patient*. The lay author, Ralph Blum, vacillates between treatment regimens, whether to biopsy or not, or which urologist to believe. Several times he is on the brink of proceeding with a certain treatment only to back out at the last moment. He perceives unwelcome news as brusqueness and insensitivity on the part of the urologist. But to his good fortune he has low risk cancer, and he was able to go many years before he had to undergo treatment. Two decades later he remains in good health with his cancer under control. He is ready to accept other treatment options should the need arise. On his investigative journey he has researched the disadvantages and side effects of most of the standard methods of therapy from surgery, radiation including seed implantation and EBRT, HIFU, proton beam, plus cryotherapy and TIP or testosterone inhibiting pharmaceuticals. (We also know these as GnRH agonists or LHRH agonists.) To his credit, Mr. Blum has researched the issues very thoroughly, and there is little there that I can find fault with. But, he fears that biopsies can spread cancer when the majority of expert opinion is that this is an extremely low risk when compared to the chance of tumor progression. He also overstates the risk of death after radical robotic prostatectomy and does not take pre-existing conditions and patient age into account.

Blum spends much time on the sexual effects of cancer treatment discussing in frank detail issues of loss of libido, erectile dysfunction, sterility, penile shortening, hot flashes and breast enlargement. Early on there is a fine section on how wives tend to react to this versus the husband, and that loss of virility should not mean loss of intimacy.

Dr. Mark Scholz, an oncologist specializing in prostate cancer, wrote the alternating chapters, amplifying in a more scientific manner the issues that Blum details in the previous chapter. He writes in a factual, sympathetic and easy to understand style. He has a knack of describing various treatments, their benefits and risks in a friendly and non-threatening manner while avoiding some of the schmaltzy expressions of his lay co-author. It is rather obvious that he also thinks that there are too many prostatectomies for low risk disease.

The positive messages of this book are clear. Most prostate cancer is slow growing and most of us will die of something else. In the 21st century patients are empowered to learn more about their disease and make their own informed decisions. Doctors' recommendations can be questioned. You can get a second opinion. Active surveillance is very acceptable in appropriate circumstances. The negative message is that there is a conspiracy of urologists to whack out every prostate within reach. The demonstrated and recognized indications and benefits of radical surgery were given lip service. Surgeons were castigated for being biased towards profit over treating patients. I thought that the title was pejorative, inflammatory and in poor taste. I thought that the lay author was more lucky than smart. I must confess that I did not like this book nearly much as those who recommended it to me.

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