

John Tefertiller Health Update - 1 January 2010

Dear Friends and Family:

Prickly Fingers and Other Side Effects

We were finally able to begin chemotherapy treatments as of about three weeks ago. There is a session of three or so hours on a chemical drip about every two weeks, and then I have to wear a drug pump for a couple of days following for the more potent of the three chemicals they are administering.

The first treatment produced only mild effects, one of which makes it difficult or impossible to drink cold drinks (the throat feels as if it's swelling shut, even though it isn't). I had been warned that my hands/fingers would also be affected with a tingling or burning sensation when exposed to cold, but that did not appear until the second treatment this week.

As interesting as some of the sensations are, it does at times make food and drink choices difficult. Not being able to order a nice cold iced tea, for instance, and having to order coffee or hot tea instead, can make for unappealing lunch and dinner combinations. Hot coffee and tacos, anyone? Even a nice refreshing glass of water needs to be at room temperature or above. Yuck.

Likewise, getting cold or frozen foods into the microwave becomes a problem because the tingling (feels like your fingertips are asleep) can become a raging burning sensation. I have learned to use a kitchen towel or potholder to grip cold items. Something as simple as squeezing a refrigerated hot sauce packet onto your egg rolls becomes a painful experience. Fortunately the effect recedes rather quickly once removed from the cold item. Hot water is your friend!

I will be watching to see what may be cumulative in these side effects, as it could turn eating and drinking into drudgery. On the positive side, though, my taste buds don't seem severely affected, and food tastes mostly normal. Just nothing cold for now.

State of Mind

There are times when I would like to just pull the covers over my head and wake up healthy in six months. The details of colostomy maintenance, the effects of chemotherapy on the physical body (even though I am aware that my effects are so far relatively light), the inability to plan much beyond getting to the next doctor's appointment-- these all contribute to moments of questioning God's good purposes in my life.

If there is anything that I fear, it is unbelief. In my circumstances, no matter how they are going, I want to be found faithful in heart as well as in appearance. This is where some of the difficult moments come from-- the struggle with my own desire to just be done with it all and get on with life. I want the glory of God, but I'm not so sure (in the flesh) about that cross-bearing part. May God give grace to keep believing.

Prayer Requests

1. I am still taking the blood thinner Coumadin. This has allowed the chemotherapy to begin, but apparently will be something of a long term item on the medication shelf. Pray for God's intervention to prevent further blood clots, or the opposite effects that can occur from taking blood thinners.
2. Pray for the chemotherapy to have its intended effects of finding any residual cancer and destroying it.

3. Pray for emotional health in addition to the healing of the physical body. I have some good friends who make an effort to not let me languish in despair, but the dark moments do come. Attitude is an important element in recovery, according to the doctors.

4. As always, pray regarding the financial consequences of this catastrophic illness. I have applied for Medi-Cal, but all I have heard so far is that a case worker has been assigned. The *Big Scary Numbers* are still looming, and only God has the resources to deal effectively with them.

Final Thoughts

Many of the things that one thinks he might do if given significant time with “nothing to do” just don't get done. Some days it is an effort to work on my photographs (trying to drag something presentable out of what I shot!), other days it is easier to sit in the recliner and just let the time pass. I know that no one will blame me, as these are consequences of the illness and treatments. Still, there is that nagging feeling that “time's a-wasting!”

All of the thoughts, fears and experiences are worthless if I am not changed in the end. Time off? Worthless unless I am changed. Fears allayed? Worthless unless I am changed. Experiences through surgeries and treatments? Worthless unless I am changed. In the end, that's all we have, isn't it? We are transformed by God's power through our circumstances to be more like the Son of God in character.

Yes, Lord, take away my fears and make the road smooth. But change me. Don't let me exit this season the same as I entered into it.

With warmest regards and thanks for your prayers,

John T.