



Male Breast Cancer: Keith's Story

Imagine getting one of the most common diseases in the world, one with tons of research, support groups and events. None of which is geared to you. Imagine having doctors that have never seen or treated a patient like you. Imagine having a life-threatening disease while feeling completely removed from it.



Keith Lackey, a successful technical animation director of movies and video games, still speaks of his breast cancer diagnosis with shock in his voice. "I thought, what are the odds? Like I should play the lottery against this." Male breast cancer odds are 1 in 1,000 compared to 1 in 8 for women. The American Cancer Society estimates ~2,470 new cases of male invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2017, with ~460 men dying from breast cancer. Men don't seek treatment quickly; and, therefore, have a higher percentage of death at 19% vs. 16% for women.

Keith was diagnosed at 36. "I was getting out of the shower and my wife said, your nipple's backwards! I would have never found it, I don't look down. I was very fortunate that she was able to recognize it." Keith's nipple was inverting. "I remember as a kid I think I had an inverted nipple which wasn't a big deal. But she felt it and didn't think it seemed normal so I went to my primary care doctor. They didn't know what it was. I was sent for mammogram, which was awkward to say the least." Keith was ordered to have an ultrasound. "She [the technician] left the room and brought back in a doctor who held my hand, which I thought was strange. I immediately knew something's happening here. The doctor said it showed signs of actual cancer and we need to move forward with a biopsy. I called my mom on the drive home and broke down a bit."

Keith learned he had a malignant tumor, Stage 2, and was put on chemo first. "I was supposed to do six rounds of chemo. I only made it through five. It got to point that I couldn't drink water without throwing up. I couldn't cough without throwing up. I lost 30 pounds in a week."

Keith's port got infected within a week. He had it taken out and a week later he discovered a painful lump in his neck which turned out to be a blood clot. He was hospitalized, later having a double mastectomy and five sentinel nodes removed, two testing positive. He was put on eight weeks of radiation and has a Herceptin IV every three weeks.

Pink Is Not My Color

Keith has tended to take next steps and info as it comes. "A lot of doctors didn't have experience with this either. My surgeon's done tons of mastectomies but I was his first or second male surgery. I think for the most part, I just go through the motions of what people tell me I should do and feel at the time."

"As a guy going through this there was nothing geared towards me. I don't feel like events are mine. Everything is pink. It made doing research and looking up stuff awkward. I found a few videos which were helpful," he said. "Family and co-workers aside, I didn't have a support group. I have never spoken to anyone else with male breast cancer."

"If I had to get any cancer, I'm glad it's well researched. Even though it doesn't feel like mine, it's not a rare one. Now all of my energy is going into my business and family." Keith has two young kids who just knew that daddy went to the doctor a lot. His kids will start early screenings in their 20's. "This is not something that I see defining me. I guess it just never felt like My disease."