WEBVTT

00:00:00.076 --> 00:00:21.692 Announcer Funding for Yale Cancer Answers is provided by Smilow Cancer Hospital. Welcome to Yale Cancer Answers with the director of the Yale Cancer Center, Doctor Eric Winer. Yale Cancer Answers features conversations with oncologists and specialists who are on the forefront of the battle to fight cancer. Here's Doctor Winer.

00:00:21.769 --> 00:00:42.500 Eric Winer Tonight we are joined by Alex, who has had breast cancer herself and is here with us to talk both about her experience and her partner Chris Peralta will also be joining us at some point in the second half. So I'm very pleased this evening to introduce Alexandra Taylor.

00:00:42.538 --> 00:00:44.769 Alex Taylor Good afternoon, and thank you for having me.

00:00:44.769 --> 00:01:12.153 Eric Winer I'm going to acknowledge to our audience that Alex is, in fact my patient. She has also been forbidden from saying anything positive about me, since that's not what this is about. So, Alex, maybe you could just start off telling us a little bit about what it was like to be diagnosed with breast cancer now, about three years ago.

00:01:12.307 --> 00:01:22.307 Alex Taylor Oh, it was possibly the biggest shock that I had for a very, very long time. It was stunned. I was stunned.

00:01:22.346 --> 00:01:31.461 Eric Winer And did you know that you had cancer before the doctors even told you you felt something in your breast or, well, that play out.

00:01:31.500 --> 00:01:54.692 Alex Taylor You know, it was it was during the Christmas break around December, towards a little after Christmas, I, I woke up one day and I was unable to get out of bed. I was physically tired. I couldn't even open up my eyes and I, I stayed laying for maybe an hour. And then I went and talked to Chris and I said, Chris, I'm just so exhausted.

00:01:54.730 --> 00:02:17.500 Alex Taylor I'm extremely tired and and I don't know what it is. I just can't snap out of it. And aside from that, I feel like my breasts are heavy. They feel heavy to me almost when I was breastfeeding, and it's just such a strange feeling. And he said, why don't you? Why don't you give yourself a breast a self breast exam?

00:02:17.538 --> 00:02:39.192 Alex Taylor And I said, I guess, where do I get that information. He was like, YouTube it. You could YouTube anything. So I YouTube it, I laid down, I lifted up my arm over my head and I felt a lump. And as soon as I felt the lump, I said, call my broker. I want to know my life insurance policy, to be honest.

00:02:39.192 --> 00:02:41.423 Speaker 4

00:02:41.500 --> 00:03:07.500 Eric Winer Oh my goodness. Well, fortunately, you haven't needed that broker, at least in terms of activating your life insurance

policy. You know, and in truth, one never knows. But in general, breast cancer doesn't make people tired. I think that that may have been a coincidence. Right. But it led you to have a diagnosis. So you saw a doctor, you had a biopsy, and it turned out to be cancer.

00:03:07.538 --> 00:03:08.230 Alex Taylor Correct.

00:03:08.269 --> 00:03:26.730 Eric Winer Then you started on some treatment, and if I remember correctly, you started on some medical treatment, some hormonal therapy before surgery, and you were on that for a number of months and then had surgery. And what was the surgical experience like?

00:03:26.769 --> 00:03:57.076 Alex Taylor I will say that my team was amazing. They walked me through everything, the possibilities, which is which as a as a as a patient, you want both the positive and the negative. I was well informed. My surgery went well. As expected. The recovery time it was was pretty quick for me, wasn't it? I think week and I was basically up and running, to be honest with you.

00:03:57.115 --> 00:04:01.538 Alex Taylor I mean, there was there was some slight pain, but nothing that was unbearable for me.

00:04:01.615 --> 00:04:23.038 Eric Winer Well that's good. One of the things I want to touch base about is the sense of partnering with your doctors. And I tend to think that the relationship between somebody who has a significant medical illness, in this case, we're talking about cancer, and the medical team is pretty important.

00:04:23.076 --> 00:04:47.846 Alex Taylor I think it's more than just important. It's it's a lifeline. It's a crutch for me. I think having the right doctor, the right team, it empowers one, the patient. It makes you believe that you can fight this if. And second, you know, I'm putting all my trust in you. Literally all my trusty. I'm putting my life in your hands.

00:04:47.846 --> 00:05:21.846 Alex Taylor And to have that type of relationship. It's it's it's indescribable, to be honest with you. You deal with fear. You know, you're you're scared, you're fearful, and you understand that that that, you know, you're you're in a delicate, a delicate situation. So to having an oncologist and a nurse and the surgeons, everyone that took that, that were in my part of my helped me with all the protocols.

00:05:21.846 --> 00:05:38.615 Alex Taylor They it was it was important. And it was one of the first times in my life I think I felt vulnerable and I was not in control and open. And it's just it's indescribable to be honest.

00:05:38.615 --> 00:05:39.461 Speaker 4

00:05:39.538 --> 00:05:50.346 Eric Winer And if you can remember back pre cancer, did it matter to you much who your doctor was. I mean, you know it may matter, but was it such a big part of your life.

00:05:50.384 --> 00:06:01.000 Alex Taylor In actuality. No. I've had so many doctors pediatricians and then you you know, when you're an adult. I changed doctors so much. But this is different.

00:06:01.076 --> 00:06:27.384 Eric Winer You know, when you're healthy, the part of your quality of life. Pi. And I think of quality of life as a, as a pie that's divided up into slices. And there are different parts that that come together that give you a sense of what your quality of life is. Your family, your work, what have you. And the part that's related to your relationship with the health care team is a little tiny sliver.

00:06:27.384 --> 00:06:34.230 Eric Winer When you're healthy and when you have a significant medical problem, it just becomes a bigger piece of pie.

00:06:34.461 --> 00:06:52.500 Alex Taylor It's almost like a parent, a parent and child relationship. Honestly, I'm looking at you like for all the answers and part of the solutions. And then I grew up a little bit. And then it becomes more of a team, you know? But in the beginning is definitely like, look, this I don't know, it's a new it's a new situation.

00:06:52.538 --> 00:07:02.423 Alex Taylor I mean, these are this is not my expertise. I would never think that I would even have to think about, you know, what you guys deal with.

00:07:02.500 --> 00:07:38.730 Eric Winer We're the experts in the cancer. You're the experts in you. And it takes bringing those people together. You know, it's it's truly a partnership between a patient and the patient's family. And the doctors taking care of that patient were long past the time when medical care, and particularly cancer care. It was something that, well, there was a time when it was something that doctors told patients what to do, but that is certainly no longer the case and was never really a very good way to do it.

00:07:38.807 --> 00:07:51.846 Eric Winer Let's let's talk a little bit about your kids. You have two kids. How how were they during this whole period of time when you were diagnosed and getting treated? Did you talk to them about it?

00:07:51.846 --> 00:08:15.384 Alex Taylor So I took the approach of how I would have wanted to be treated as if it was the other way around. I was 100% honest with my kids. I took him to appointments. You all met them, which was important for me, for them to meet you. We bought a book. Didn't necessarily work out in a sense. I think it felt it was.

00:08:15.384 --> 00:08:35.769 Alex Taylor It was more important for us to sit down and talk to them. My daughter was she wanted to know every single thing about my treatment. So every night we watch videos and I gave her the best answers that I could. So when I came home after my surgery and I told her that I was going to have to have chemo, she knew exactly what was going to happen.

00:08:35.769 --> 00:08:54.884 Alex Taylor And she said to me, mama, don't

worry about it. I've watched tons of videos. I can, I can paint in your eyebrows and we'll go and get you a wig. My son, on the other hand, he loved it when I was bald because he could run my hand and he was like, you're like a genie. But but I, I didn't hide anything from them.

00:08:54.884 --> 00:09:12.769 Alex Taylor We even watched movies. And I know we watched a movie by they think it was called if. And in the movie, the mom passes away and the father is going through treatments. And my son looked at me and he was about five years old, and he said, mama, could you die from cancer? And I said, yes, but I'm not going to.

00:09:12.846 --> 00:09:29.153 Alex Taylor So we had those honest conversations and it wasn't. It's a difficult in the beginning, but but now we talk about it often and, and, and I personally don't feel like there's any fear behind it with them.

00:09:29.230 --> 00:09:33.500 Alex Taylor It's a it's it's important. It's important to keep them in the loop.

00:09:33.692 --> 00:09:34.576 Speaker 4

00:09:34.576 --> 00:09:58.384 Eric Winer Tell me a little bit about the kinds of financial problems that cancer caused. Because, you know, increasingly we're talking about this. And it's not just the big medical bills that affect some people, not everyone, because some people have insurance that takes care of all that. But there are days off from work and days that your family members have to take off from work.

00:09:58.538 --> 00:10:05.076 Eric Winer And there are other expenses you don't expect. Did that. Was that something that was a problem?

00:10:05.115 --> 00:10:34.576 Alex Taylor I work in the medical field. I work in patient services. So we receive those calls from patients, the deductibles that are hitting their pockets. It's it's horrible. If I could be honest at times treatment is is unaffordable for certain families. And I think that that sometimes leads to people not getting diagnosed at the correct time, especially in minority populations going to the doctors.

00:10:34.576 --> 00:11:01.153 Alex Taylor And when you're uninsured or if you're you have a high deductible is not an option. And that leads to being diagnosed, diagnosed either at a late stage of cancer. So the affordability part of this is just as scary as the diagnosis. I personally know people that don't have time off. They can't take the time to go for the treatments.

00:11:01.153 --> 00:11:23.653 Alex Taylor They can't take the time to even after the physical therapy. It's it's optional for them. So the cost of cancer is it changes your life. Even with me having health insurance, I literally have to look at my time off and I have to pick between taking time off for myself or saving some of those days for my kids.

00:11:23.730 --> 00:11:33.076 Alex Taylor So the when when it comes to health insurance, if I can be just as honest as possible, it's it's just it it can destroy a family.

00:11:33.153 --> 00:12:05.653 Eric Winer No. And, you know, a very high percentage of families where one person has cancer have huge financial problems. And in fact, bankruptcy is not uncommonly caused because of medical treatment and specifically cancer treatment, partially because it can be so very expensive even in the setting of good health insurance. And if you don't have good health insurance, the prices of drugs and surgery and everything else, it's really astronomical.

00:12:05.692 --> 00:12:32.423 Eric Winer It is something that is a crisis in our country and something that we really need to address. And of course, it is felt that much more by people who are in minoritized populations. So you yourself are Latina. That's a group of people who sometimes don't have some of the same resources. You want to think about this?

00:12:32.461 --> 00:13:02.500 Alex Taylor Oh, absolutely. It's heartbreaking. And when I say it's heartbreaking, I've I've talked to sisters, I call them that have to make the choice between going to the doctors for an ultrasound, knowing that they possibly have a this is in their genetics. The and decide on whether or not if they if they go to the doctors or pay their rent because the deductibles.

00:13:02.538 --> 00:13:24.730 Alex Taylor I mean, I know that there's laws that protect women, but at the same time, the same laws have found their way to still add a large amount of bills in someone's pocket. The deductibles are high. And as a Latina, that's that. At times it's not an option. Going to the doctors when you are ill is not an option.

00:13:24.769 --> 00:13:40.846 Alex Taylor When I know what's around the corner for them and I tell them, I try to tell them that there are programs, even though not all programs are accessible to everybody, especially now. But it's scary. It's a scary time right now to get sick.

00:13:41.000 --> 00:13:41.269 Speaker 4

00:13:41.307 --> 00:14:09.538 Eric Winer No, I think that that is a huge problem. We're going to have to take a brief break. We're going to come back. We're going to still have you on the show, and then we're going to talk briefly with Chris, your husband, at the at the very end. We will be right back. My guest tonight is Alexandria Taylor, who is a woman with two small children who has been dealing with breast cancer over the last several years.

00:14:09.576 --> 00:14:11.538 Eric Winer And we'll be right back.

00:14:11.615 --> 00:14:30.192 Announcer Funding for Yale Cancer Answers comes from Smilow Cancer Hospital, where artificial intelligence works together with the latest imaging technology to help diagnose cancers at earlier stages and treat them more effectively. Learn more at SmilowCancerHospital.org.

00:14:30.269 --> 00:14:53.576 Announcer It's estimated that over 240,000 men in the US will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year, with over 3000 new cases being identified here in Connecticut. 1 in 8 American men will develop prostate cancer in the course of his lifetime. Major advances in the detection and treatment of prostate cancer have dramatically decreased the number of men who die from the disease.

00:14:53.576 --> 00:15:20.307 Announcer Screening can be performed quickly and easily in a physician's office using two simple tests, a physical exam and a blood test. Clinical trials are currently underway at federally designated comprehensive cancer centers, such as Yale Cancer Center and at Smilow Cancer Hospital, where doctors are also using the Artemis machine, which enables targeted biopsies to be performed. More information is available at YaleCancerCenter.org.

00:15:20.384 --> 00:15:23.769 Announcer You're listening to Connecticut Public Radio.

00:15:23.807 --> 00:16:00.192 Eric Winer Hello again, and welcome back to the second half of Yale Cancer Answers. This is Eric Winer and I'm here tonight with my guest, Alexandria Taylor, who has had breast cancer. And she's providing her thoughts on what the diagnosis has done in terms of her family, the challenges created, but also, in many ways, the pleasure that it has occasionally provided in terms of opening up relationships that might not have otherwise existed.

00:16:00.269 --> 00:16:01.307 Eric Winer Is that fair, Alex?

00:16:01.346 --> 00:16:30.461 Alex Taylor Oh, no, that's absolutely right. It's it's it's created number one. I've gotten to know myself in ways that I never thought possible. It's lined my desires of certain. You know, I you know, you always think, oh, you know, I always want to take this class or I always wanted to learn a specific skill. And it's kind of created like a bull's eye to things in life that I've put in the back burner as a parent that I've decided to to fight for, you know.

00:16:30.500 --> 00:16:31.076 Speaker 4 It.

00:16:31.076 --> 00:16:31.884 Eric Winer Clarifies things.

00:16:32.000 --> 00:16:33.230 Alex Taylor Oh, definitely.

00:16:33.307 --> 00:16:34.269 Speaker 4 So we were talking.

00:16:34.269 --> 00:17:10.576 Eric Winer Before about some of the financial problems and the fact that some of these financial burdens are that much greater in people who are Latina, people who are black, people who are in other sorts of minority groups, but separate from that, separate from the financial problems. Many people talk about the different experience that black and Hispanic people, in this case women with breast cancer, have when they go through the the treatment.

00:17:10.576 --> 00:17:19.653 Eric Winer And do you want to just talk for a few minutes about both your experience and the experience of other Latina women?

00:17:19.730 --> 00:18:00.307 Alex Taylor Support is huge support from your employer and support from your community. Support from your family. I don't think that I could have gotten through this as well as I did if I didn't have my family, if I didn't have the partner that I had, if I didn't have the support within my coworkers. And not everybody has that. Depending on the type of job that you have all the time that you have, it does affect your lifestyle during and after your treatment.

00:18:00.346 --> 00:18:02.461 Speaker 4

00:18:02.538 --> 00:18:18.038 Eric Winer And what about, because I know you're a member of this group, what about Sister's Journey, which is a support group for black and Latino women? What's the impact of that kind of group on someone in your situation?

00:18:18.115 --> 00:18:40.730 Alex Taylor Well, for one, the name is correct. They are my sisters now. We are sisters for life. I would say that my first meeting with them, it was almost like a welcoming home. I could almost tear up. But I tell them all the time it was almost like a welcoming home. They gave me so much support. We did it through tears and laughter.

00:18:40.730 --> 00:19:01.461 Alex Taylor It was factual. They didn't sugarcoat anything for me. I tell anybody and everybody when they're going through this, please find your brothers and sisters that are going through the same thing that you're going through because it's huge. And sisters journey, not only was it a support for me, but it turns out that it was a support for my daughter.

00:19:01.461 --> 00:19:16.038 Alex Taylor I thought that she would go there to drink the coke, that she's not allowed at home. But it turns out that when I missed a meeting, she said, mama, when? When is our meeting with Sister's Journey? And I said, I just missed it. And she said, but you don't understand what they mean to me.

00:19:16.076 --> 00:19:16.692 Speaker 4

00:19:16.692 --> 00:19:51.000 Eric Winer That's that's amazing. Well, the first time I went to sister's journey, what struck me more than anything else was the awareness that every single person there had that as a result of the color of their skin, they felt that their care was had the potential to be compromised. Oh, yeah. And that is really very sobering. And we have to continue to work to a place where everybody gets outstanding medical care.

00:19:51.076 --> 00:20:07.038 Alex Taylor Everybody wants to be heard, especially at a vulnerable time like this. So it's really important to understand people's cultural backgrounds in order to treat them, because it does affect how they will relate to you.

00:20:07.115 --> 00:20:39.076 Eric Winer Listening to to to you, listening to the others and sisters journey is really in many ways and I opener for many of us and it's it's just so important. Finally before we we we switch out and have Chris come on the show. Tell me a little bit about the impact of breast cancer on your relationship with Chris. What's what's the impact on your day to day relationship, on intimacy?

00:20:39.269 --> 00:21:01.538 Alex Taylor It goes through its stages. To be honest with you, it wasn't easy in the beginning, especially when I think for him, adapting to the new me was different. I was a little bit more vulnerable. I relied on him a little bit more. I'm very headstrong. I know what I want, I know what I like, I can take care of myself.

00:21:01.653 --> 00:21:25.423 Alex Taylor And it was a very scary, scary time for me. And then at the same time, we're raising two kids who also needed the equal amount of attention. So I think that it's it's it's not an easy road. It was difficult for him because at the same time, he always was very strong and positive. And he expressed that, you know, she's oh no, she's going to be fine.

00:21:25.423 --> 00:21:34.884 Alex Taylor She has a great team. And it was hard for him to hear my fears because he didn't. I don't think he was ready to hear that I was nervous.

00:21:35.076 --> 00:22:00.500 Eric Winer Well, you know, you you raise a very important point, which is that oftentimes family members will say that once the treatment is over, they're looking forward to it because the person will be back to themselves. But the challenge is that it's a new normal. Oftentimes our patients know that, but it takes a while for the people who are close to them to accept it.

00:22:00.500 --> 00:22:08.461 Eric Winer And I think, you know, not frequently, but sometimes that leads to relationships really not succeeding.

00:22:08.615 --> 00:22:13.000 Alex Taylor Yeah. Because on the shell I'm the same person, but I'm not on the inside.

00:22:13.115 --> 00:22:24.000 Eric Winer Well, Alex, it has been a pleasure talking to you. I'm that much a better person as a result of getting to take care of you as well.

00:22:24.076 --> 00:22:53.653 Alex Taylor Okay. And I just want to say thank you again. Thank you for allowing me to speak. And and hopefully anyone that hears this understands that, that you can push through and and you will get better. Do the work spiritually. Emotionally. Medicine. Take all all of that. And there is another side when you get over that hump of the treatment, the the surgery, the chemo, the radiation.

00:22:53.692 --> 00:22:57.730 Alex Taylor You will cross that line where you start to get comfortable again.

00:22:57.884 --> 00:23:02.615 Eric Winer And not to put words in your mouth, but find the right team because.

00:23:02.730 --> 00:23:04.038 Alex Taylor It's important.

00:23:04.115 --> 00:23:23.461 Eric Winer And I'm not just talking about for medical expertise, but medical care involves both medical expertise and it involves really socially understand somebody. You can provide excellent care, but without compassion and without really trying to understand people, it doesn't feel the same.

00:23:23.500 --> 00:23:25.076 Alex Taylor No. Absolutely not.

00:23:25.307 --> 00:23:52.230 Eric Winer Okay. Let's talk to Chris. So now we're joined by Chris Peralta. Chris is Alex's partner. I've been calling him her husband. And apparently that's okay with the two of them since they've been together for three decades. How tough was this for you, for Alex to go through all that you went through with her cancer, and she went through a fair amount.

00:23:52.269 --> 00:24:00.423 Eric Winer I mean, she had hormonal therapy, which she's still on, and chemotherapy and surgery and radiation. And it was a long haul.

00:24:00.538 --> 00:24:28.692 Chris Peralta There were many stages of uncertainty, many stages of doubt. I think the most difficult portion of this was entrusting in the care that she was going to receive. Obviously, it's a little difficult for the person that's taken care of, the one that he'd love to know that they're going to be in the best hands possible when it comes to treatment, especially when you know you hear the word cancer.

00:24:28.692 --> 00:24:51.038 Chris Peralta It's a it's something that you fear you. It's something almost like a death sentence sometimes for some people. For myself, I have a look, you know, I'm Latino, man, that just doesn't really go to the doctor that often. So to us, to go to the doctor is a little difficult for us to take matters into our own hands and then to entrust someone else to do it.

00:24:51.038 --> 00:25:14.346 Chris Peralta So one of the things that was difficult when she was going through the process is knowing that her choice of chemo and her choice of radiation was going to, you know, hinder our our ability to take care of everything that goes on in the household at the same time. So I think there's a lot of fear, there's a lot of uncertainties.

00:25:14.500 --> 00:25:42.615 Chris Peralta You don't know how the impact it's going to impact her physical body. At the same time, there's a lot of things that I would have to say I felt guilty of sometimes saying, I wish it would have been myself going through this and not you and, you know, taking the burden of the whole treatment. And that's that's mainly what, you know, in, in my, my experience has been did.

00:25:42.615 --> 00:25:51.192 Eric Winer You or do you still worry about the cancer posing a threat to her life?

00:25:51.269 --> 00:26:20.115 Chris Peralta Absolutely. Every day, even once we were done with the first bout of, you know, hormone therapy, and then you get the diagnosis that you do need to go through surgery and then go through chemotherapy and then go to radiation. And even then, you know, I am aware that once it's there, it's unknown. It could come back. It could be hidden, dormant for years.

00:26:20.115 --> 00:26:31.384 Chris Peralta But that's always a thought in my mind. And going through the whole process all over again is something that is a very difficult thing as a caretaker to do.

00:26:31.538 --> 00:26:44.500 Eric Winer Does it push you to make the most of every day, or is it not something that that sort of affects your your day to day interactions?

00:26:44.576 --> 00:27:11.230 Chris Peralta To be honest with you, I have a very demanding job, and being present physically and emotionally is very difficult to split. My time between my personal work, my home life, and splitting time with the children. So whenever I was at work, she was doing some treatment. So my mind, you know, I might be physically somewhere at work, but my mind is always on her.

00:27:11.384 --> 00:27:35.769 Chris Peralta What her treatment is going through, what she's experiencing. Then I'm also thinking of all the chores and the duties that I have to take care of once we get home, because I know she's going to be too weak and tired to do anything else. So being aware that we, you know, that that could possibly be a routine down the road, maybe, hopefully not, is always a thing that it brings fear.

00:27:35.769 --> 00:27:44.076 Chris Peralta But at the same time, it also brings back the ability to know that we got through it the first time. We'll get through it again.

00:27:44.153 --> 00:28:06.769 Eric Winer But it is pretty striking because, you know, you have all the worries about Alex. And then on top of it, you have all the added burdens of the things that she used to do. I was doing, and now you have to pick up. So I mean, it's both physically and emotionally exhausting. Well, listen, Chris, we're going to have to wrap it up.

00:28:06.769 --> 00:28:17.153 Eric Winer Thanks for the for the comments and the insights. It's really valuable for people to hear someone be able to talk about their story the way you can.

00:28:17.192 --> 00:28:24.423 Chris Peralta Well, thank you for having us. And I really appreciate all the work that you do. And we we're in it every day.

00:28:24.500 --> 00:28:38.346 Eric Winer This is Eric Winer I've been with my guests, Alexandria Taylor and her partner Chris Peralta, talking about the

experience of going through breast cancer treatment. Talk to you all next week.

00:28:38.423 --> 00:28:57.346 Announcer If you have questions. The addresses CancerAnswers@yale.edu and past editions of the program are available in audio and written form at YaleCancerCenter.org. We hope you'll join us next time to learn more about the fight against cancer. Funding for Yale Cancer answers is provided by Smilow Cancer Hospital.