



Patient Power

How Can Humor Help When Dealing With a Serious Illness?

Jeff Bushnell

Care Partner

Summer Golden

MPN Patient and Advocate

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Andrew Schorr:

Hello and welcome to Patient Power. I'm Andrew Schorr in the northern part of San Diego, a place called Carlsbad. But to the south in San Diego County are my friends Summer Golden and Jeff Bushnell who are a married couple, been together many years, and Summer is living with myelofibrosis for a year or so, takes the medicine, like I do, Jakafi. And Jeff is her care partner, very active in seeking information. And Jeff, you found me, right?

Jeff Bushnell:

In my search for information I found you, and we've met and actually worked together a little bit there at the ASH conference and got a lot of tremendous information from you and from Patient Power.

Andrew Schorr:

Right. Well, thank you so much. And as Jeff mentioned, he's helped be part of the Patient Power team at a recent medical conference here, and we're very grateful. He's a former airline pilot. And along the way as an airline pilot, Jeff, you started taking some improv classes, and that's how you met the lady with the red hat there, right?

Jeff Bushnell:

That's a fact, yes, sir.

Andrew Schorr:

True love in acting and improv. Summer, how long have you been in the drama, acting and comedy field?

Summer Golden:

Well, let's see, I started out as a ballet dancer. I've probably been acting for 20 years, been in improv for 15, something like that, yeah.

Andrew Schorr:

Okay. And the two of you have, we should say, in San Diego you have a theater and Jeff helps run it, and you're very devoted to helping in the dramatic arts people with disabilities, right, summer?

Summer Golden:

Right.

Andrew Schorr:

Well, that's tremendous. But there's a little cancer that's come into play, and I want to talk about that. So in March of 2018 you got the confirmed diagnosis of myelofibrosis, so you and I are like blood brother and sister like that because I have it too, but you've actually done a comedy routine about this cancer.

Summer Golden:

The way it happened, I was kind of really despondent. I thought maybe I'd have to give up my business and all that, and I've never had any kind of illness before this.

So then one night I was thinking what can I do, and I started thinking, what if I turned it into comedy? So I e-mailed my comedy teacher because I've taken improv--I've taken stand-up before, and I said, does someone ever do comedy about cancer? He wrote back and said, yeah, if you have it, yes. So I wrote back and said I'm coming to you next class, and when I did the first routine I'm usually not nervous like that but I was terrified because I didn't know how people would take it.

Andrew Schorr:

Here's a little excerpt from Summer's comedy routine.

Summer Golden video:

The nurse from the myelofibrosis company calls me once a month and she is very nice, but I can't help but thinking she's calling to find out if I'm still around. And it's kind of like the body counts in a retirement home. At the beginning--I think my doctor's here. Are you here? I can't see her. But anyway I hope she's here because she's incredible. Oh, hi.

She was talking about having a bone marrow transplant, and however grateful I would be to the donor I don't think I can handle that. I have to take my own sheets when I go to a hotel. I don't like the idea of my blood touching someone else's bone marrow. When I got my diagnosis I went to my improv rehearsal right after that and the coach said, oh, today we're going to talk about our day and put it into a scene. And I said, oh. Well, I just found out I have an incurable cancer. He just looked at me. Oh. Will you back next week?

Andrew Schorr:

So do you think being able to look on the kind of funny side of it helps us as patients?

Summer Golden:

I do because a lot of times I guess when you get an illness like that you feel like something else is controlling you and everybody's telling you how you should do it, and you really don't have any control. But if you can turn it into humor you feel like, at least I felt like I had control.

Andrew Schorr:

So, Jeff, how do you feel about it? What would you say to patients and to family members to try to not just see this as doom and gloom but maybe be able to laugh?

Jeff Bushnell:

I think it's wonderful. It is really her--Summer's very much into attitude towards this will really help you with the disease, and the laughter helps us get through some of the hard parts, really. And I'm very interested--we kind of have a partnership. She takes care of the attitude and the mind stuff, and I'm very interested in the medical stuff so that's why I do all the research, and I'm interested in that. And then we have a great doctor that takes care of her portion, and so we work really well as a team.

And it took us maybe a month and a half to kind of get into what I think is critical. You need to keep going with your life, and you need to live every day to the fullest, and this comedy has been a wonder for Summer to not dwell on this disease, and she focuses on coming up with new stuff for her routine and doing that kind of thing, and it really helps.

Andrew Schorr:

I want to thank you for being with us, thanks for your devotion to people with disabilities with your theater. It's wonderful work. And let's all keep on keeping on, okay? We won't let this MPN hold us back. Jeff Bushnell, Summer Golden, thanks for being with us on Patient Power.

Jeff Bushnell:

Thank you, Andrew.

Summer Golden:

Thank you.

Andrew Schorr:

Okay. And Andrew Schorr to the north in San Diego County and reminding all of us knowledge and laughter can help be the best medicine of all.

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