



Patient Advocate Don Armstrong: How an AML Survivor Gives Back

Don Armstrong
AML Patient and Advocate

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Andrew Schorr:

Let's go to Fort Worth, Texas, and joining us now is Don Armstrong, who was treated for AML. Gee, Don, in 2005 your whole world turned upside down, right?

Don Armstrong:

It absolutely did. September of 2005, I had no idea there was anything wrong with me until I had a couple ladies tell me on a Friday afternoon I looked horrible. That ultimately led me to see my general practitioner, and a couple of days later I was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, and from there right into the hospital, right into treatment.

Andrew Schorr:

Right. And you were in the hospital for a long time.

Don Armstrong:

I was. I was in the hospital the first time for 33 days.

Andrew Schorr:

Wow. And ultimately you had a transplant, which is one of the approaches still for AML, and you survived.

Don Armstrong:

I did. I did. Yeah, it was interesting. That first couple of days in the hospital there was so much activity going on around me and I couldn't understand why I was getting so much attention until one of the nurses kind of pulled me aside and said, you understand you've got a 25 to 30 percent chance of surviving this type of leukemia, don't you? And I said, now I do, yes. So it was quite a shock to the system, and it was something that—you just have to kind of hang on and just go with the program as much as you can.

Andrew Schorr:

And a shock to the family. I mean, it's a family affair.

Don Armstrong:

No question about it. Whenever you're diagnosed with cancer, no matter what the cancer is, it's just not you. The

entire family is involved. And I had a great support system. My dad and my brother and my sister came from different parts of the country just to be with me and support me. I had an unbelievable group of family and friends that were there with me every single day.

Andrew Schorr:

And you had a transplant. Where did the donor cells come from that sort of rebooted your immune system?

Don Armstrong:

That's a great question. I'm actually currently still looking for my donor. My donor, he was happy. I know he's a male. He was excited that he was able to help me, but I have never been able to connect with him. I'm trying again. I just—so through the Be the Match I got my stem cells, and fortunately there was someone there that was willing to give my life a second chance.

Andrew Schorr:

Now, Don is very active with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, which is a partner in this program. Don, you've spent many years now, your career has been in golf and you were a golf superintendent, and yes, you sprayed pesticides on the golf course. You're devoted to giving back. Talk a little bit about that and what you try to tell patients and families, so they can get through this hopefully successfully, as you have.

Don Armstrong:

You know, like we had talked about, I had no idea there was anything wrong with me when I found out I had leukemia, and I was in for a pretty big fight of my life. After five rounds of chemo and a stem cell transplant, making it through that, I felt like I had been given a second chance, so I wanted to find a way to give back. And I found The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. I found one of their campaigns, Team in Training. Started doing the endurance events and raising money for that organization. Just did my 2015 retraining event, but through it all I really wasn't doing it just to run a marathon. I was doing it to raise money for research so that somebody else hopefully didn't have to go through what I went through. So for me that was a big shift in my mindset. That eventually led me into being a part of the board of trustees, and I continued along that line. And I try to stay up on as much about AML as I can, and I talk to as many patients around the country as I can whenever I'm given the opportunity.

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