

The President's Letter

WHAT IS MEANINGFUL

As we were flying to Washington, my seatmate asked whether I liked Atlanta. I was going home, and he was going to a meeting of clergy to discuss the possible conflict with Iraq. He told me he was a pastor of 2,000-member congregation.

I decided to ask him about a problem I have been wrestling with. The problem is, What kind of message can we give prostate cancer patients to get them to rebalance their thinking, to accept that prostate cancer is part of their lives, and to move on? At many support groups and conferences, I talk to both individual men and couples who seem preoccupied with the disease. Yet the best thing for them and their relationships is to focus on something else.

Focusing on other areas of life is the first step in improving the quality of life for the individual and the couple. The by-product is that it can spark optimism. Studies have shown that a positive attitude can suppress recurrence of disease.

The pastor was familiar with prostate cancer. He knew that many people focus on the disease and are on tenterhooks, worried whether the next PSA will indicate recurrence. While they worry, they divert energy from other parts of their lives. They do not enjoy everyday activities that were fulfilling and satisfying before the diagnosis. Instead, they sit and wait.

I said this is exactly the kind of situation ECPCP wants to help patients change. How do we get men back into their own rhythm and routine? It has to begin with renewing the mind, the Pastor said. Men have to become excited about something, he continued. They have "to create something they think needs to exist." It does not have to be a global undertaking, just something meaningful for them. In the Pastor's case, twenty years ago, he started a church. He found what was meaningful to him, as all men must.