

Meet David Morse of Sarasota Prostate Initiative



Today we'd like to introduce you to David Morse.

Hi David, it's an honor to have you on the platform. Thanks for taking the time to share your story with us – to start maybe you can share some of your backstory with our readers. Sarasota Prostate Initiative, Inc, (SPI), a charitable 501C3 was formed in 2018 to incorporate Men to Men of Sarasota, a program initiated in 1989 with the support of Sarasota Memorial Hospital. SPI provides the opportunity for men facing prostate disease to learn about the many treatment and diagnostic options available to them, while at the same time providing peer support to guide these men on this life-threatening journey.

David G. Morse is President of SPI which emphasizes spreading awareness of the disease which affects equal numbers of men as breast cancer does women.

I grew up in a wonderful small Boston suburb and enjoyed friends and sports and great health through my younger years, enough so to end up at Harvard College studying Russian and European History while playing two Division One Collegiate sports – a busy four years for sure. After a short stint playing professional baseball and starting a military journey, I spent time in Vietnam with the US AID program helping the Vietnamese deal with the ravages of war.

A career in public service with US Agency for International Development, then with the City of Boston and its poverty program, made up my professional life, while also running 6 summer hockey camps for kids from all over New England. These were event-filled years, most importantly the years of raising my three boys with their broad interests in music, sports, and life.

These were critical times historically as Boston dealt intensely with school and neighborhood integration processes, the bussing of students, and racial strife in the heart of the City. As a Mayor's representative, I was in the midst of it all and learned a lot about getting people together around divisive issues – to communicate, and to heal.

In 2001 I moved to Florida to care for my parents. My father had been diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer after a long battle. A huge decision time for all as my father passed away after a heroic fight. With my mother now on her own, I decided to stay in FL.

Ten years later, I too was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I remained in Florida to this day and have discovered a great mission in helping other guys and their partners get through this fight with prostate disease – a disease that affects about 270,000 US men annually – equal to breast cancer affecting 290,000 women.

I no longer run marathons, but I do play tennis 5 times a week when injuries allow. After 4 years of “Aggressive Surveillance” followed by a complete regimen of radiation treatment, I feel as good as ever. Medical care in Greater Sarasota is recognized worldwide – thus the name “Sarasota Prostate Initiative” for our non-profit. Our goal continues to be to reach out to men who wonder “What do I do next?” – For these men there are answers! There are options! Our outreach to these men and partners is our primary goal.

In 2011 my diagnosis came to me when I called the doctor after waiting 2 weeks to receive the results – an agonizing and fearful, and I thought inexcusable, delay. I was about to board a plane for Cincinnati and the start of a new job, still with some discomfort from the biopsy done three weeks earlier. The diagnosis was that I had Gleason scores of 6 and 7 from 2 cores, and I was told to return to see the doctor in a month to determine a plan. Not much help for my anxiety level.

Finally, I met with the urologist to discuss my diagnosis. He stated I should have my prostate removed. I had done considerable research and felt this was a rather radical step given my diagnosis. I eventually parted ways with this urologist, found many resources among the

urological and oncological community, checked my insurance carefully, made some changes so I could extend my research of doctors to other states – especially my home state of Massachusetts, home of Dana Farber Cancer Center.

Within a few months, after visits with 6 or 7 different doctors, a visit to Dana Farber in Boston, and to Lahey Clinic in Boston, I was pretty determined to try “Watchful Waiting” or what I preferred to term it – “Aggressive Surveillance”. I would continue to seek consultations with these various oncologists, urologists, and radiation oncologists; I would continue to take every diagnostic test that was available.

Fortunately, my journey led me to a support group – Men to Men. What a blessing this was. This provided an opportunity to share experiences with other men at various stages of their journey. Monthly meetings were held with medical experts in the field – oncologists, urologists, Eastern medicine experts – acupuncturists, diagnosticians, general practitioners, nutritionists, and others. The information sharing proved immensely valuable. And importantly gave me a sense of peace that I was not alone in this battle.

My decision to remain on “Aggressive Surveillance” was virtually supported and even encouraged at all levels from doctors to cancer centers to support group members. After 4.5 years of Aggressive Surveillance and a final year of Oncologist-monitored use of Casodex and frequent PSA tests, my PSA had risen and my oncologist said it was time! – for more radical treatment.

A month later, after many more reviews with my “medical team”, a 3T parametric MRI, and a targeted biopsy, I decided to go through a complete 38-day radiation program coupled with hormone therapy for about 1.5 years (some prior to, the balance after, radiation) and brachytherapy/seeds implantation – kind of the whole ball of wax so to speak.

Now, 9 years after diagnosis, I feel great; PSA has been undetectable... knock on wood – another blood test soon. I remain active with Men to Men, serving as co-chairman and then Chairman for the past 5 years. And created a non-profit, Sarasota Prostate Initiative to carry on and even expand upon that work.

Sarasota is one of the United States preeminent centers of medical services related to Prostate cancer and other related disease. And it is a center also for outstanding support services provided by hospitals, cancer centers, and community groups. With this history, Sarasota can be the center of growth in improving awareness and education for men seeking options for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for prostate and related diseases. Sarasota Prostate Initiative plans to address these issues.

We all face challenges, but looking back would you describe it as a relatively smooth road?

On the health front – always challenges as Prostate Cancer presents many, many options for diagnosis and treatment and while that is a wonderful result of medical advancements, particularly over the past decade, it also presents huge challenges for the consumer/patient to analyze the choices and find the correct treatment for their individual disease.

On the administrative level, we have had great success due to perseverance, but must overcome the intrinsic jealousy among and between medical groups and hospitals. Of course, the biggest struggle is procuring financing to keep the programs alive. A constant battle.

Thanks – so what else should our readers know about Sarasota Prostate Initiative, Inc.?

The mission of The Sarasota Prostate Initiative is to increase awareness of diagnostic and treatment options available to men with prostate disease and to guide and support them through their journey.

Specific goals:

1. Doctors make presentations – with Q and A – at monthly support and education meetings.
2. Outreach to more areas to spread the word to more men.
3. Educate and support diagnostic and treatment options.
4. Promote Sarasota as a preeminent center for prostate health.

We are uniquely positioned at the heart of a strong Prostate Cancer medical center – Sarasota. The doctors here are world-renowned. We operate a number of Support Groups in the area to help men figure out their course of action in dealing with prostate disease. Even during the COVID pandemic, we maintained our monthly meetings without a break by instituting virtual meetings every month. The disease does not take a break – nor did we.

In addition to our monthly meetings, we have a number of important programs:

- * Peer-to-Peer Mentoring – often a man just needs someone to sit down with, to share experiences – we have nearly 100 men in this program at any one time.
- * PSA Screening – The most critical single action men can take is to monitor their health status. For men over 40, this means doing a PSA screening annually or more often. We provide a monthly Free Screening program open to all.
- * Minority focus – Black men suffer prostate disease at 3 to 4 times the rate of White men. We do our monthly PSA program in the heart of the Black community and operate our monthly Men to Men meetings at the newly opened bank in the community.
- * Health Fairs – In the Black community as well as other communities, we help organize health fairs to inform the community.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

Women are critical to the success of what SPI does. Men need a partner to help them through the crisis of cancer. They need support, they need a more objective analysis of what the doctor is telling them, they need help with the research, and they need emotional support.

Contact Info:

- Website: prostatesarasota.org

Programs

- **Monthly Support Meetings – Awareness**

On the third Monday of each month at 2pm, Men to Men invites a medical doctor or other guest to answer questions and present information to enhance the awareness of men and their partners who seek information on diagnostics and treatment options (and there are many!!) for prostate disease.

We meet IN-PERSON as well as VIRTUALLY via ZOOM.

- **Peer to Peer Mentoring**

Men are urged to make contact with us. Perhaps just a telephone call, or perhaps just an email. A short conversation can open the door to the possibility of dialogue. This dialogue can lead to open discussion about shared experiences and can answer basic questions. This can greatly assist with the cancer battle.

- **PSA Screening - Testing**

The PSA test (for Prostate-Specific Antigen), at one point several years ago seen as perhaps over-used by the medical community, has since regained its position as the preminent method for the early detection of prostate disease.

We hold monthly PSA testing at a site in Newtown on the third Saturday of the month. No registration required, no doctor's order needed. This is a 5 minute blood draw with results within 48 hours.

- **Conferences – Seminars**

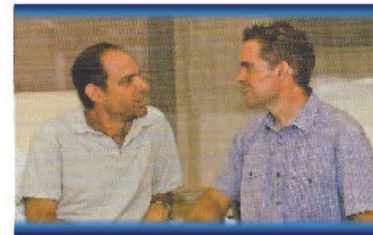
Conferences and seminars provide a wealth of information, often from doctors and others from locations around the world. We make these conferences available as a resource and often help with the organization of them. Where needed, virtual contacts are available by ZOOM and other meeting formats.

Sarasota Prostate Initiative is planning a Sarasota-based Conference in the near future as Sarasota and surrounding communities are such a vital resource of globally respected medical care.

- **Partnerships**

The solutions for those facing prostate disease require the aid and assistance of many resources. Sarasota has a remarkable number of such agencies and others who are able to collectively address these issues.

The Cancer Resource Network has brought together a large number of such agencies and helps them all reach out through community gatherings and presentations.



CTAC 2018 Event Eloise Werlin Park
Photo by Andrea Hillebrand



Programs

- **Outreach**

Outreach is perhaps the highest goal of The Sarasota Prostate Initiative – that goal being to create awareness for more men and their partners. Men are notoriously reluctant to open up about their health issues and particularly so when it comes to the prostate which affects such personal activities.

In order to offset this problem SPI is aggressively moving toward creating new Support Groups and new ways to reach more and more men and their partners.

- **Outreach – Under Served communities**

Significant outreach has occurred in the Newtown community of Sarasota which is largely Black. We have worked with numerous partners in the community to create PSA Testing, COVID testing, and joint support meetings. Similar efforts are planned for the gay community.

- **Outreach – new groups**

New programs have been set up, or are in the formative stages in Lakewood Ranch, Venice, at Doctor's Hospital in Sarasota, in Clearwater, and in Newtown (Sarasota).

- **Outreach – Social Media**

The use of social media has increased and includes every format from Facebook to Linked In, Twitter, and even Tik Tok – all in an effort to reach out to more men.

- **Outreach – Public Presentations**

We have made a number of presentations on Television talk shows, radio shows, and Cancer Resource Network meetings.

- **Resource Materials**

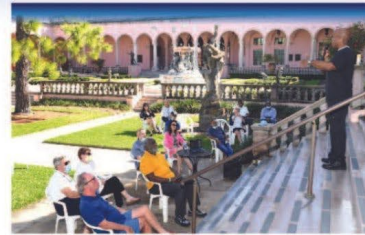
The amount of material available to the man facing prostate illness is overwhelming. The most difficult process for a man is to select the important materials that apply to his particular situation.

Sarasota Prostate can help sort through the myriad articles, position papers, medical studies, and descriptions of diagnostic and treatment modalities.

We have an extensive list of articles and videos.

Likewise we have a list of local and national support groups.

We have a comprehensive list of cancer resource and providers.



Dr. Dwight Fitch presents at the inaugural Newtown-Sarasota meeting at The Ringling

