

Prostate-cancer survivor praises Layton

London City Councilor Harold Usher, the author of a book on prostate cancer, says it's a positive boost to awareness when public figures speak out

By Ellen Ashton-Haiste

A cancer diagnosis is always an unfortunate event. But when someone in the public eye – such as federal NDP leader Jack Layton, who in February announced he is battling prostate cancer – speaks out about that diagnosis, there's a boost to public awareness.

“Even though it's a negative thing for the individual, it's a positive thing to bring it to light,” says Harold Usher, a 70-year-old London, Ont. city councillor and author of *Prostate, Prostate, Prostate, A Problem of Men*, which chronicles his own cancer journey. “I think he (Layton) must have caught it early, likely because he was getting a checkup. And the whole idea is that men realize they need to get regular medical checkups and identify these things as early as possible, so that they can treat it when it's in early stages rather than at an advanced stage, after it has metastasized.”

In fact, Layton's press secretary stated that the cancer was caught during a routine health check.

Former Liberal health minister Allan Rock, who had surgery for prostate cancer nine years ago, was also quoted in Niagara's weekly alternative online edition *The Pulse*, praising Layton for speaking out and raising awareness.

“It's really great that another public figure has spoken publicly about this,” Rock said.

“There's something about men; they're shy, self-conscious, reluctant to talk about men's health issues.”

Says Usher about Layton, who is 59, “What he has to be careful of is that he knows how to take care of himself and to deal with whatever the after-effects of the treatment will be.”

Those after-effects, as well as the range of treatment options, are laid out in Usher's book, along with information about prevention through a healthy lifestyle.

Should Layton read the book?

“It’s interesting you ask that,” Usher says.

“Because I wrote a letter to his wife.”

He says he’s acquainted with both Layton and his MP wife, Olivia Chow, through serving on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities when Layton was head of the association and both he and Chow were Toronto city councillors.

Usher says he decided to write to her “because it’s always the woman who looks after these things,” and he told her the book might provide valuable information on up-to-date options for treatment and beyond.

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