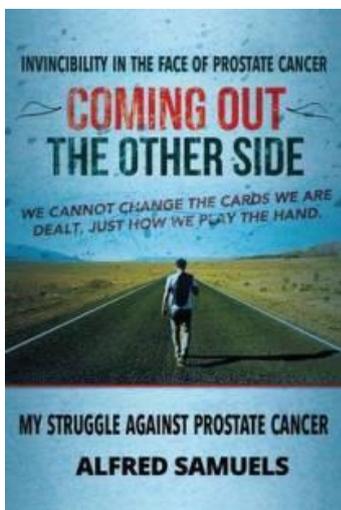


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Invincibility in the face of prostate cancer: coming out the other side (2015)

Samuels A.

The Cloister House Press, 2015.

240pp.

ISBN 9781909465435.

£11.95.

Average star rating 3.4 (out of 5)

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This is an excellent read. It is most useful for the diagnosis and symptoms of prostate cancer, especially for BAME men; it gives a very useful guide to what to expect. It is also the journey of one man who experienced this type of cancer.

I like how everything is set out, from the cover, through the table of contents, to the content; it is well thought out and very well written. The cover is appropriate as many BAME men do not want to know or get tested even if they show symptoms. It is very informative, clear and to the point, but strikes the right note to men from the BAME community; if this was the intention, it is excellent. It brought back memories of what I went through, so I feel that it is well worth the read.

Prostate cancer survivor (56-65) (September 2016)



Although this could be read by anyone, it is about someone with advanced prostate cancer and would therefore be most useful for someone who, due to the advanced state of their cancer at diagnosis (stage 4), faces the same traumatic journey. The author is offered treatment with a selection of experimental drugs, and his experience could be supportive to someone in the same position. He goes into detail about the effects and side-effects of the cocktail of drugs he must take and candidly describes the physical and emotional difficulties he has had to deal with.

The content is easy to follow; the author explains technical words as he writes and deals with the topic in chronological order from diagnosis to 'maintenance'. I did not notice any inaccuracies, but I am not familiar enough with the subject to comment. There is a lot of repetition in Chapter 4 – about taking his drugs – and this could be abridged. The cover is perfect; the endless road ahead illustrates diagnosis and always being mindful of recurrence, even if one remains in remission. The typeface is very clear, and the general layout fit for purpose. The tone varies, from despair to optimism at the end of the book. The quality of his writing does vary, due to the effect of drugs on his mental state. He must have struggled at times to keep account of his daily suffering, especially when he first embarked on the experimental programme.

I was impressed by his honest, candid style. He explains in detail how the disease affected him physically, emotionally and financially and at times it is heart breaking to read about his loneliness, despite a supportive partner and family. I was moved by his account. He wore his heart on his sleeve and although it is difficult to read, it is informative about how someone copes during treatment. I felt involved in his journey and was delighted when the drugs programme reversed his readings.

Skin cancer patient (56-65) (January 2019)

This is the experience of someone affected by prostate cancer. The author describes his bodily changes and his feelings about these, and his treatment, which can guide someone affected by prostate cancer as well as carers, family or friends. It could be useful for symptom experiences and coping with diagnosis and treatment.

The author handles the topic in a logical order. He first describes his life before diagnosis, then his experience of diagnosis, treatment and the support he received. He also describes the delays and setbacks he experienced. It is quite easy to read and understand. The author uses simple words that anyone can understand. I like the picture on the front, but the cover is quite wordy and looks cluttered.

I like the honesty in the author's accounts of his feelings and encounters with healthcare staff. His book will be quite useful to those affected by prostate cancer, especially if recently diagnosed or experiencing symptoms. It describes a man's journey through diagnosis and treatment as well as his struggles and strength along the way. It shows his fortitude and determination to keep on in the face of adversity.

A relative and friend of someone with prostate cancer (36-45) (December 2018)

This is a readable, well-written book that will support and reassure any man being treated for prostate cancer. It will also be useful for carers and family. The author explores not just the physical hardships but also the emotional battle, which can be just as difficult. He never glosses over the pain and, at times, loneliness. He also covers the financial problems that can arise when someone has cancer and shows how difficult it can be to obtain help, e.g. disability living allowance. He relied on help from his partner and family to prevent financial ruin and it makes you think "what would I do". Is it worth a younger person taking out insurance "just in case"?

The author documents everything in diary form initially, which is very useful. There is no glossary, but the drugs (apart from those he was given as part of the trial) and PSA tests are familiar to me as I have been through the same with my husband. The cover is appealing; it makes the reader realise that the man is taking a journey and that at the end of the day he faced that journey alone! Despite support from family, friends and medical staff, you are on your own with your struggle to cope.

There isn't really anything I can criticise about the book. I suppose for someone who doesn't have advanced prostate cancer, e.g. it hasn't spread to the bones or elsewhere, it could be frightening to hear how much pain the author went through. However, it is also reassuring to see how he came through and learned to cope.

I found the spiritual focus uplifting. Some readers may not find it appropriate, but this is Alfred's story as told by him. His family is very important to him, especially his children, to whom he is very close despite some being scattered around the country. His partner is a new relationship but incredibly supportive. He brings all this personal stuff into his story, which makes the book very readable – you can empathise with him. At the end, he reiterates how EVERY cancer patient deals very differently with their personal journey. Having known quite a few cancer survivors (and non-survivors), I can vouch for this. Every experience is different, every way a person deals with it is different and every outcome and journey forward is different. There is no right or wrong way. This is one man's story, but it is a worthwhile read and I thank the author for sharing his most intimate thoughts and feelings to help others.

Caring for my husband who has prostate cancer (66-75) (June 2018)

This is an easy read with useful information for all aspects of dealing with prostate cancer, particularly family feelings and relationships. There is lots of insight into the day-to-day handling of everyday issues.

It's an attractive book and the font is a good size. It is easy to understand; it sometimes flits back and forth, but this is acceptable, although I was confused about his children, how many, where they lived, their ages.

Overall, this is very useful for the emotional side of dealing with prostate cancer. I like the fact that the author is a local man; I was keen to see what local resources he used, and which path his treatment took. Once I picked it up I could not put it down!

Relative of prostate cancer patient (36-45) (October 2016)



The life of the author is laid bare throughout this book. It is one person's journey through prostate cancer from start to finish and will be useful for most stages. I don't like the repetition at the beginning, day by day. This grates at times, but there is no other way and it is through no fault of the author,

Colon cancer survivor (Over 75) (September 2018)

Alfred Samuels gives a very open and detailed account of every aspect of the prostate cancer pathway, from diagnosis, to side effects, emotional difficulties, financial difficulties, and survivorship. He gives a well-rounded review of not only the physical aspects of cancer, but how it impacts on all aspects of your life. His book would be most useful for a prostate patient considering participating in a clinical trial. Specifically, Alfred was in Arm G of the Stampede trial, so anyone in this category may benefit from reading about the physical side-effects of treatment, which at times were quite difficult for Alfred to cope with, and the benefits of taking part in the trial, including the high level of cancer management because of the abiraterone tablets.

Alfred generally follows the path from diagnosis to treatment, management, and survivorship, which gives a flow overall as the reader is with him on his journey. However, within chapters, the topics change rapidly, and are repeated in later chapters. Some are discussed in unnecessary detail, such as living arrangements or details of Alfred's job, which may not be useful or interesting to the reader. This is understandable as the book is made from diary extracts not necessarily aimed at a reader at the time, but further editing would benefit the flow of the chapters.

It is easy to understand as it is written from the patient's viewpoint and Alfred explains the processes and appointments quite well. However, paragraphs are at times too regimented, or cover everything at once. For example, in a military style, he writes that something occurred at "1040 hours" – fine for his records but too much detail for readers. At times, one page covers several topics – side-effects, emotions about his partner or family, financial struggles; this reflects the elements going on but can feel disjointed. The cover is a good representation of how patients may feel as they begin their long journey but appears to have at least three titles. It would help if there was one concise title, with a shorter subheading. The layout is quite good, and the font and spaces between paragraphs help to space out the information, even though at times the information is a bit jumbled.

I love how honest Alfred is about side-effects and emotions; he talks openly about topics that are difficult for patients to discuss, including loss of libido and financial strain. It may promote discussion if read by a partner. However, although some parts are interesting, it is quite disjointed in parts and doesn't flow clearly or grip me. Although it is important to express the information, it is also vital to create a flow. Rather than discuss unnecessary detail and information, the book would benefit from chapters designated for specific topics e.g. family, finances, side effects.

I have read books by patients before and this didn't grab me, but it has details of the trial programme, how it works, and the side-effects and emotions surrounding this. I would direct patients specifically in Arm G of the Stampede trial to certain areas in the book, rather than recommend it to all prostate patients.

Therapeutic radiographer (Under 25) (July 2017)

This is a very honest and detailed account of what to expect and how to overcome certain hurdles. It is easy to understand; the technical words only relate to the cancer itself. The design is a bit simple – a man walking away – and I would suggest a stronger image, maybe a man facing cancer?

Relative of prostate cancer patient (Under 25) (June 2017)

At first, I wasn't sure how helpful this would be. The author talks a lot about his drug regimen, appointments, and daily life, and I did not feel it would be helpful to someone with cancer or those around them. However, as I read on, I realised it offers a good perspective for friends or loved ones; it will help them understand what the patient may be thinking and feeling. It will also help health professionals because it sheds light on how someone with cancer feels about their care.

The most useful aspect for someone with cancer is its ultimately positive outlook. However, I don't feel it's the best book for a patient, as it describes pain, suffering, and hopelessness graphically. While these are a reality, it may not be helpful for someone to anticipate this for themselves, or to suffer it again through someone's story. Religion and faith in God are significant to the author, so it may not be helpful for those who don't believe in God. Further, those with a terminal diagnosis may find it gives false hope (the author was initially told not to make long-term plans but survived longer) or makes them feel bad because they have no chance of surviving.

The author handles the topic in chronological order and uses plain English, so the book is generally understandable to the lay person. There are typographical and editing errors that may annoy readers who put a premium on grammar and accuracy. The cover is eye catching and has words of empowerment and positivity.

I like that the author bares his soul, sharing his innermost thoughts to help others. He is very real, and I found myself liking the book even though initially I wasn't sure it was helpful. At times, I disliked the format of journal entries; many parts are repetitive (drug doses, timing of appointments). As a book offering a patient's perspective, it is quite useful. Overall, it is not uplifting, and may be too much of the same pain and suffering that someone with cancer is already dealing with. I may recommend it – it lets people see into the mind of someone with cancer without the filters that a friend or loved one would put up. I would like to give it 3.5 stars, but that's not an option. It's a good book and shares one man's personal story about his journey. However, for the reasons above, it isn't necessarily the best book for the patient.

Relative of someone with metastatic prostate cancer (46-55) (May 2017)

This is a detailed description from a prostate cancer patient who recovered from stage 4 cancer over three years, but it doesn't give much advice until the end. It is made clear in the final pages that a positive attitude and the will to live, coupled with emotional support, gave real impetus to the author's strength and ability to recover.

The heart of the book is a daily diary of the author's first few months of participating in a clinical trial of chemotherapy tablets and hormone treatment (abiraterone). The daily descriptions of pain and constant sweating are relentless. The strength he draws from his family is very important and maintaining a positive attitude is, he believes, also key to his recovery. Financial concerns are a real issue and add stress to his situation. His claim for disability allowance is rejected but Macmillan provides a £250 grant for new clothes. It is an honest account of a cancer journey.

It is easy to understand. There is no need for a glossary though it might have been useful for readers to know more about abiraterone, when it was introduced and how effective it has been. PSA is noted as 2.4 (p. 70) and then 254 (p 74); in both cases, it is described as improving, so I assume page 70 is inaccurate. The cover isn't particularly appealing, but the main script has a good typeface and is easy to read. The author's photo is at the back of the book but there are no others.

I like the final summary of what to do and not do: bad thoughts = bad reactions; adopt a positive attitude; don't believe everything you read; don't let others play doctor;

other people's stories aren't helpful; there is no substitute for a good companion. An important part of diagnosis is emotional wellbeing and the author suffered financially. Macmillan helped him financially and through the phone buddy scheme.

Initially, the author describes the warning signs of prostate cancer and points out men's reluctance to see a GP. We are told he has a 10-minute appointment for his diagnosis, shocking given the emotional impact. However, it is a positive story; he was told not to plan long term, but his determination won through. I like the advice at the end but would prefer it interspersed in the diary alongside the daily routine of treatment; the almost daily words "tablets taken as prescribed" become monotonous.

Friend of prostate cancer patient (56-65) (March 2017)



I would not suggest reading this book. I did not like it at all (and I really wanted to!), in fact, it made me feel quite angry.

I found the diary format annoying as the entries themselves are poorly written; it is very disjointed. There is no glossary. The cover is crowded and does not reflect the content, which I found to be irritating and rather negative. The tone is overwhelmingly angry and negative – even if this was not the intent. I am sorry to say that I felt no connection to the author or the book.

Retired oncology health care professional and close friend of someone with advanced prostate cancer (56-65) (June 2018)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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