

Noel Edmonds

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Noel Edmonds is not afraid of much. He'll drive a racing car to the limit, or land his helicopter on your front lawn. But he doesn't mind admitting he's dead scared of prostate cancer. The fear began with the final illness of his adored father, Dudley Edmonds, ten years ago:

"My father was a very proud man. I can't recall an occasion when he discussed his health. He certainly didn't mention a problem in this zone which is sensitive for any man until there was something overwhelmingly wrong.

"He was first diagnosed with prostate cancer at the age of 65 and I have the impression that treatment was not taken as seriously then as it is beginning to be now. He had been a smoker - both my parents were - but ironically gave up a few years before.

"I think both my parents dealt with knowledge of his cancer by withdrawing into themselves. When Dad finally did let me know there was trouble he said it was likely to reduce his life expectancy by a couple of years. When I phoned the consultant, who was a lovely chap, he told me 'I'm afraid that isn't true - he's got six months at best'.

"In fact, Dad survived another nine months but I wish he'd been able to tell me sooner. That's a regret. It would have made things a little easier for us. I do feel cheated because he died in his early 70s which is no great age today.

"As it was we had a fantastic, very close male relationship. When I was a kid we'd go off to West Ham together to watch the footie. When I wasn't making a lot of money he supported me. I was mad keen on motor sport and he got me a kart. We actually built a sports car together from a kit - called a 'Mini Jem'. And when I went to work at Radio Luxembourg he actually completed the car on his own. The memories are really warm.

"I shall never come to terms with his death. Speaking about him now is still painful. I miss him every single day and constantly talk to him. In fact, there's a large photo of him on the wall in my office and I often sit at the end of the day and ask his advice. I have a strong faith that I'll see him again. I feel he's protecting me, especially when life is difficult. (Noel's long association with the BBC has just been abruptly terminated by BBC1's controller Peter Salmon). Fortunately his influence is all around me and my daughters all remember him with great affection.

"The year he died was the hardest. My daughter Olivia was born in the spring and dad died just before Christmas. It was a question of one door opens and another closes. I worked throughout that period in light funny television but his example helped me through. He was a great one for the stiff upper lip.

"My parents used to live in Hertfordshire but a little while before his death they moved down to Devon to be near our farm so he spent his final days in the little cottage hospital at Okehampton. The staff could not have done more for him and I never doubted that the doctors gave him the best. I was with him when he died and also present when my father, full of painkillers, finally said goodbye to mum - it's a 'characterful' experience.

"The real problem, of course, is men's attitude to their health - you know, 'I'm a real man I'm never ill so I don't see the doctor'. I think that's stupid.

"I take the same attitude as I do with my helicopter. Every year the machine goes for a complete overhaul. They literally take it to pieces and put it back together again. It's just technology and it's the same with your body. The human nether parts may be more sensitive but I think you need to be just as practical. I now know that prostate cancer kills younger men too. I don't want to be one of them

"Fortunately, apart from dad, there's no family history of cancer. Mum is a ripe 82 and, at 50, my tests (and testes!) are fine. But until there's a 100 per cent accurate test every man should be scared of prostate cancer and deal with it by getting checks.

"I am really impressed that the Daily Mail is getting behind the need for men to become more conscious of the risks from prostate cancer. Just as women have learned to think positively about monitoring their bodies for any suspicious signs, I'd like men to do the same. Suffering in silence or hoping it won't happen is like playing Russian roulette. Prostate cancer will affect one in ten of us.

"There's also an issue of fairness here. Prostate cancer kills 10,000 men every year. Vast sums are spent on other forms of cancer prevention and cure. Yet only £47,000 a year goes on prostate research. Does that mean men's lives and deaths don't matter? Is society saying 'Men don't complain so we can safely ignore their illnesses?'

"I don't think we want to get into a turf war for budgets because cancer is a terrible illness whenever it strikes. But I do think men have been their own worst enemies up to now. Why do half the men with prostate cancer avoid seeking treatment until it's too late? Answer: they think it's manly not to trouble the doctor. Take that to its logical conclusion and the doctors would be out of work. My advice is to trouble the doctor with every legitimate symptom - and get the government to fund testing.

"I personally have an annual check and three months ago had the PSA blood test as well as the horrible physical exam. They even x-rayed and ultra-sounded everything. I'm not a hypochondriac but I've studied all the workings in that department just as I would with automotive and engine parts and am happy to announce mine is a normal size for my age!"