This is the sixteenth newsletter in a series of ONCORG Community Conversations. They're focused on relationships between doctors and patients, and the complexity of treating cancer.

October 2026 – Why are we so afraid of cancer?



Rodney Thomas is a senior officer working for ONCORG, INC, headquartered in Mt. Laurel, NJ. ONCORG was developed as a comprehensive cancer support service for those seeking a first or second opinion for their cancer.

Mr. Thomas is a military veteran who served eight years in the USAF. He also spent eleven years in the automotive industry, ten years in healthcare and eight years with Apple Inc. supporting customer needs.

Why are we so afraid of cancer?

The more I learn about cancer, the more I can appreciate how complicated it is. In 2016, while working for Apple, I had a bout with throat cancer and a large mass one inch cube was removed from the base of my tongue, followed by a procedure to remove lymph nodes in the neck. This procedure is called a neck dissection or cervical lymphadenectomy. Prior to the cancer diagnosis, I was coughing up significant blood otherwise called hemoptysis. My primary doctor and subsequent oncology specialists worked with swift speed and I'm now grateful.

I was worried about losing my hair caused by cancer treatment. I have very nice hair and it is a big part of my appearance (LOL), or how people perceive me. My worry is completely normal, valid, and shared by a majority of patients—it is not superficial.

As a veteran, I was not afraid of dying in battle, but I was afraid of losing a limb or suffering great pain before dying. In summary, these all the stigmas associated with cancer. It's about how we die.

Cancer has been a feared disease in the U.S. Shouldn't we be most afraid of what is most likely to kill us? Ten years ago I was. However, we are educated consumers who research everything that might impact us. And in the event we are afflicted with cancer, be aware this is one modality where science and medicine have made remarkable improvements with greater clinical outcomes and higher survivable rates. I also remind our readers that early detection, and doing something about 'it' is critical for your wellbeing.

So why are we so afraid of cancer? We're control freaks and don't like to lose control. We don't like our lives disrupted.

Pain and Suffering:

Radiation and chemo is very painful and uncomfortable. It can suck the life and dignity from us. The continuous decline and ongoing agony and severe side effects can drive the most courageous person to quit. It will affect 'how' you live and 'how' you die.

Lack of Control and Schedule:

My friends Kelli and Sam have cancer treatment appointments every two weeks. Kelli has a devoted sister to take care of her and Sam has her devoted husband who will do anything for her. They are both knowledgeable and plan trips or events around their treatments. Most people don't have this type of support system making them feel helpless against a body cell process that turns on itself.

The Denial Game:

I learned years ago from my previous cancer episode that it's important to deal with medical issues sooner than later. But that's not always the norm for most. Delayed action or deep fear of cancer can backfire. It's like gambling with your life. Many people are so terrified of a positive diagnosis that they avoid routine screenings or postpone seeing a doctor for early symptoms. To take liberties and share an analog, think of the many overweight people who don't recognize how excess weight affects their blood pressure, expose them to heart attacks or even a risk of a stroke. Think about that. Do most people willingly face the fact they need to do something before the worst happens?

To be real, early screening gives us something we can do. Many women and their doctors feel that a screening mammogram is the most positive action they can take to 'soften' their fears. It's empowering to have a clean mammogram screening. You want to feel empowered? Do your early screenings and maintain your emotional balance.

Let's be real

We can never be accurate when talking about why we fear cancer. Your life stage has much to do about how one would respond to a cancer scenario. How old are you? Have you lived much and are satisfied? Do you have a great deal to live for like personal wealth? Are you young enough to have young children and must live for them? The questions are endless.

In closing, we're not going to avoid perception of the fear of cancer. So what do we do? Many people surround themselves with a great support system, some turn to faith, and some accept the fact that we expire at some point. I believe the fear of cancer exceeds the risk of cancer.

This is Commander Rodney Thomas, signing off for today. Be safe out there.

Rodney Thomas

ONCORG – Chief Communication Officer