

## Why Having Cancer Made Me a Better Thoracic Oncologist

**David P. Carbone, MD, PhD**

Director, James Thoracic Center, James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute  
Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center

*Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of our sponsors, contributors, partners or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.*

**Andrew Schorr:**

Hello and welcome to Patient Power. I'm Andrew Schorr. I'm sitting with a man who knows about lung cancer and the progress being made because of his work as a thoracic oncologist. He knows about cancer because he's lived it himself with a diagnosis. Dr. David Carbone from Ohio State, thank you so much for being with us.

**Dr. Carbone:**

Thank you. Glad to be here.

**Andrew Schorr:**

Now a few years ago, you had some problems in your neck, and you diagnosed yourself with having what turned out to be a tumor in your chest. So here you are a thoracic oncologist with a lung-chest-based cancer. So that's kind of a shocker, so you lived it. Does that give you a different perspective, do you think, in the way you carry on in your career?

**Dr. Carbone:**

Absolutely. I think I was always an empathetic person, but you really can't understand what a cancer patient goes through unless you've lived it. And while it's not a recommended part of medical education, it is something that I survived. And I think I'm better in many ways for it.

Back then, I presented, I was shaving one morning, and I noticed my neck veins were sticking out. And I diagnosed myself with superior vena cava syndrome, which results from a bulky tumor in the chest. And when I got back from the meeting, I ordered a chest X-ray on myself, and it looked for all the world like stage III lung cancer. And so I presented my own case at our thoracic tumor board. And my buddies, the surgeons, took out part of my left lung and biopsied the mass in my chest. It turned out to be a large cell lymphoma, which was good news. But as a father of four, even having the 50 percent cure rate or a 30 percent cure rate—whatever it was at that time—was a shocking change in my life.

**Andrew Schorr:**

As you said, you had four children. This changed your family life, didn't it? Maybe tell us about that and how you've gotten to a better place too.

**Dr. Carbone:**

It was a very painful process. I had young kids ranging from I think 6 or 7 years old until early teens. And every one of them reacted differently and had a different understanding of what was going on. And then on top of that, I remember very clearly when I told my wife of the diagnosis said well everyone has to die of something and left me. And it ended up, she left the kids too. And so I was not only struggling with my cancer but single parenthood with four kids for five years, which was a tough process.

But I remarried five years later, and I'm in a better place now. And so the details are irrelevant. But I really know the effects of cancer on families—good and bad—the importance of looking forward instead of backward and helping your kids through the process as well, the importance of supportive and non-supportive interactions in families. And I think it helps me better interact with my patients who are going through similar processes.

**Andrew Schorr:**

Well, we wish you all the best with your health, ongoing, and want to thank you so much for your devotion to lung cancer patients worldwide. Thank you so much, Dr. Carbone.

**Dr. Carbone:**

It's a pleasure and an honor.

**Andrew Schorr:**

So really you have a lot of people out there trying to help you and people who've lived it as well like Dr. Carbone. So take advantage of these resources and really get smart about what you're dealing with, so you get the treatment or your family member does for what's right for you. I'm Andrew Schorr. Remember, knowledge can be the best medicine of all.

*Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of our sponsors, contributors, partners or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.*