

Otto Krueger finds miracle cancer cure in Bahamas

Not yet approved in the U.S., new ultrasound technology enables Dubuque school board member to destroy diseased tissue in the prostate gland without surgery.

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Otto Krueger.
Photo by Dave Kettering.

The numbers tell Otto Krueger his trip was worth it.

"I was at a top of 7.3 -- you want it at 3 -- and now I am at 0.4 with an asterisk," Krueger said.

The asterisk means Krueger's prostate-specific antigen (known as PSA) level -- the number that signifies prostate health -- is healthy and low, and could be even lower because of measurement limitations. A PSA of 4 or higher is generally considered a sign of possible prostate cancer -- the disease that strikes a gland located below a man's bladder. It affects more than 240,000 American men annually.

"I still have my prostate and I'm back to playing racquetball," said Krueger, a member of the Dubuque Community School District Board of Directors.

His journey to health took him out of the country for a treatment not yet approved for use against his form of cancer in the U.S.

Krueger, 59, traveled to the Bahamas earlier this year and underwent a procedure called high-intensity focused ultrasound therapy, or HIFU. The treatment involves using ultrasound energy to ablate, or destroy, diseased tissue in the prostate gland.

"We're burning precise little spots of the prostate," said Dr. Alex Horchak, of UnityPoint Urology Clinic at UnityPoint Health-Finley Hospital.

Horchak participated in Krueger's procedure and has treated patients with HIFU since 2006.

"It's a procedure that is non-invasive," Horchak said.

Because of HIFU's precise targeting, the treatment reduces the risk of impotence and incontinence -- two potential side effects of standard prostate treatments, Horchak said.

Krueger studied many options before choosing HIFU. He learned a brother-in-law of a friend underwent the procedure, as did one of Krueger's uncles in Germany.

"That sealed the deal for me," Krueger said.

In the case of HIFU, the deal can be a costly one.

Because it is not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration, many insurance companies will not reimburse patients for HIFU treatments.

Krueger's approximately four-hour treatment cost \$25,000, for which he took out a home equity loan.

"Insurance didn't cover it," he said, "but it is tax-deductible as a medical expense, so that will help at the end of the year."

The FDA is overseeing clinical trials of HIFU in the U.S., but FDA official Morgan Liscinsky told the Telegraph Herald the agency couldn't provide specifics on possible approval.

"We cannot confirm the existence of or comment on any current or pending product applications, so we cannot speculate as to whether or when such technology might be approved in the U.S."

Krueger believes the cost and travel is worth it because of the therapy he received.

"I didn't have to have chemo, no radiation and no drugs," he said.