

## [TRACK 1: INTRODUCTION]

**Narrator: Robert O' Gorman**

[Jim]

The urologist explained my treatment options: surgery to take out the entire prostate, limited surgery with radiation or watch and wait. My wife and I felt like we had to decide on the treatment right away.

[Bill]

I'm used to being in control of my life, taking charge at work and at home. I'm really upset that my cancer has returned, especially because my current treatment options don't seem like they will help me much.

[Jim]

You know, it was kind of tough, but I asked Bob about his cancer. I was so relieved that he wanted to talk about it. And, once I heard how similar his experiences were to mine, I started feeling better.

[Bill]

I recently heard some of my friends talking about the healing effects of what they called complementary and alternative therapies. I searched the Internet for more information, to see if I should give any of these therapies a try.

[Narrator]

Each day, we all make decisions about our lives. Some of these decisions are fairly easy to make, like what time to get up and what clothing to wear. It takes more time to make other, more important decisions -- about school, marriage, children, finances, and death. These decisions involve other people, either because they will be affected by the decision or because their opinion is important. Sometimes, our freedom to make important life decisions is limited by forces beyond our control, perhaps by health insurance.

[Narrator]

And, we all have different abilities for making decisions about our lives. Some people feel they hold the power to decide. Others feel that life is beyond their control and that they have little ability to make any decisions for themselves.

[Narrator]

Our ways of making decisions are often shaped by whether we are male or female, our family background, our culture, our education, and our role or station in life. These patterns are powerful shaping forces that influence why and how we make decisions when a crisis or serious illness occurs. For cancer survivors, which means anyone who is living with a diagnosis of cancer, many factors affect the decision-making processes.

[If you would like to follow along with written material while listening to this program, please visit the toolbox website at [www.cancersurvivaltoolbox.org](http://www.cancersurvivaltoolbox.org), where you can print a copy of the transcript.]

Let's listen to what Joan, an oncology nurse, has observed in working with many cancer survivors over the years.

[Joan]

When people are faced with a diagnosis of cancer, their abilities to make decisions about even the simplest daily events may be shaken by the very word "cancer." Too often the word "cancer" is wrongly linked with death. For example, think about a time when a family member or friend had to have medical tests. Think about their relief when the tests came back and showed no cancer. Their response might well have been, "Thank goodness it wasn't cancer."

[Joan]

A diagnosis of cancer can paralyze your usual ability to make decisions about your life and health temporarily or even for a long period of time. You may feel overwhelmed, anxious, angry, or at a loss to make any decision. These feelings are common. When faced with decisions about life, health, or death, many people become uncomfortable because of their emotions or fears. You may want to hide from them or you may choose to face them head on.

[Narrator]

As you know, making decisions is very hard during an emotional crisis, such as a cancer diagnosis. First there is a new language -- the language of cancer -- to learn and understand. Think for a moment about going to sleep in your own home and waking up in another country where people speak a language very different from your own. Now, think about being in that other country and being faced with decisions about cancer: what kind of treatment you need, what you will feel and look like, whether you can go to work, and when you can do the things you used to do. Imagine how frightened and helpless you would feel to wake up in this strange place, having to speak a language you don't know, and needing to make decisions that will affect the rest of your life. Is it any wonder that our emotions and the strange new language of cancer can interfere with making decisions?

[Narrator]

If you find yourself in this situation, you don't have to feel out of control. There are skills you can learn to help you make decisions. While these skills will help you make a decision, they will not tell you which decision to make. No one but you can make the best decision for you.

Welcome to the Cancer Survival Toolbox<sup>®</sup> program entitled "Making Decisions." In this program, we will go through some skills that can help you make better decisions about your life and your cancer. After listening to this program and working through the exercises, you will be better able to:

- Identify how you prefer to make your decisions;
- Find out the benefits of getting a second opinion to help you make decisions;
- Learn how much time you have to make a decision;
- Weigh the PROS and CONS in making a decision about your cancer treatment; and
- Understand that you are an individual, not a cancer statistic.

"Making Decisions" is just one of a series of Cancer Survival Toolbox programs designed to help you learn the basic skills essential to self-advocacy. There are also programs on communicating,

finding information, solving problems, negotiating, and ways to stand up for your rights. In addition, there are programs on special topics like finding ways to pay for care and living beyond cancer, as well as programs on different types of cancers. You can listen to or read these programs online at [www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox); you can also download the audio files from iTunes.

The Cancer Survival Toolbox comes with a free Resource Booklet, also available at [www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox). Resources and organizations related to each Cancer Survival Toolbox topic are included.

Now, let's talk more about the topic of this program, making decisions.