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## **Nashuan has a message: Cancer is no death knell Cancer**

**Jerry Kaplan wants to help people fight grim diagnoses of the killer disease.**

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NASHUA - "Cancer sucks."

That's the first part of the title for a book Jerry Kaplan is writing.

Four years ago, the 58-year-old Kaplan was diagnosed with inoperable liver cancer, which actually turned out to be bile duct cancer with tumors in the liver. A doctor told him he had a 7 percent chance of survival.

Kaplan told the doctor what he could do with his statistics.

"You are either zero percent or 100 percent!" he says.

Recently, Kaplan formalized the work he started during his own recovery: helping cancer patients with similarly grim diagnoses rally the support necessary for fighting the good fight. About a month ago, spurred by a friend in the medical profession, the 18-year city resident created "Against All Odds," a free advocacy agency dedicated to that battle.

Kaplan's aim is wide. He wants to help cancer patients and their families get as much information as possible on traditional and complementary therapies and find second and third opinions when necessary. He also addresses issues of insurance, research agencies that might offer help, and disability financing.

He says fighting cancer takes attitude, education, family support and "doctors who take as much joy out of your progress as you do."

"I really feel my wife and two daughters are a large part of my survival. They were so amazingly supportive," Kaplan says. "I always loved them, but now I just cherish them."

Kaplan's non-profit agency has also applied for a federal tax number and created a four-member medical advisory board made up of nationally recognized experts. In addition, it has set up a local board of directors. Currently, the agency is seeking funding, office space, computers, furniture, staff, volunteers and more for an effort Kaplan says he hopes will quickly grow. His long-term goal is to run a local office and spin off satellites throughout New England and across the nation.

Kaplan says at the outset, he and his wife, Carol, realized they would have to do their own legwork.

"I recall asking the doctor in Boston: 'Do I have any chance of making 60?'" he says. "He said: 'Absolutely not'. I started to learn the art of advocacy." Four years ago, Kaplan was referred from Southern New Hampshire Medical Center to a Boston specialist who ordered a biopsy and told Kaplan he would have to wait two to three weeks for the test. "I said (I want the test) tomorrow," Kaplan said he told the doctor. After the biopsy, performed the next day, the doctor again told Kaplan he would have to wait - this time, for the results.

"I said, 'No. Tomorrow'," he says.

His request was granted.

At the meeting the next day, the oncologist told him there was one treatment that might work, but had as much chance of killing him. "You best go home and put your things in order," the doctor advised. Kaplan says he and his wife sat in the parking garage at the hospital and stared at the walls.

Then one of them said, "Let's call Matt (Dr. Matt Sherman)," a cousin's husband who is an oncologist and genetic scientist at the Genetics Institute in Cambridge, Mass.

Sherman referred them to liver surgeon Jean Emond, then at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, now head of the liver program at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York.

They called the Boston doctor and requested that Kaplan's test results be forwarded to Emond.

Kaplan says he and his wife were forced into the role of advocate yet again after learning that the overnight delivery service had failed to deliver his medical records because of one misplaced digit on the address.

"My husband may die because of this. Find it (the address) and deliver," Carol Kaplan, normally an easygoing person according to her husband, demanded after calling the delivery service.

Kaplan is a businessman who has spent his working life in marketing and sales for large corporations and start-up companies. He says he was used to speaking up for himself. The cancer diagnosis sharpened those skills. "I say to my family, 'No one has a chance to help if they don't know what your needs are,'" he says.

When he makes his presentation to cancer patients, Kaplan begins by comparing statistics: 1,216,000 killed in World War II during a four-year period 59,000 killed in Vietnam during a 15-year period 50,000 highway deaths annually and 500,000 cancer deaths every year in the U.S. alone. Every year, he tells his audiences, 1.3 million-plus cases of cancer are diagnosed in the United States.

He says cancer does not discriminate. Its victims are young, old and those in between black, white, yellow rich or poor.

In addition, five out of 10 men alive today will face the disease as will four out of 10 women. More than 90 percent of the population will be touched by this disease.

"Cancer sucks! Now let's get on with our lives," he urges audiences, quoting from the title of his book- in-progress.

Cancer changes - and challenges - every aspect of life, Kaplan says, but it is also an opportunity for family and friends to grow closer and stronger. There are no quick fixes or easy answers. But Kaplan says when he and his wife and their two daughters, Laura, 23, and Lisa, 20, attend the American Cancer Society's annual "We can" weekend for active cancer patients, they encourage others, share their stories and offer to help. Sharing, Kaplan says, is strong medicine. It's also key to the newly formed agency.

"Most important is we area group of volunteers who've been through it - all cancer patients," says Kaplan. "We're someone for them to talk to."