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## **Cancer survivor now focuses on helping others**

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A little over four years ago, Jerry Kaplan underwent a liver biopsy at the Deaconess Hospital in Boston. The prognosis was grim. He had bile duct cancer and tumors in the liver. There was one procedure he could undergo but, the doctor told him, it had a high risk of killing him.

The physician informed him that he had a 7 percent chance of survival and, at most, maybe another two years to live. Most likely, however, he would last three-to-six-months.

"I asked the physician if I would live long enough to reach 60," said the Nashua resident who was 54 at the time. "He said absolutely not." The message was go home. There's nothing to be done.

Kaplan, 58, thought otherwise. "I'm a fairly positive person," he said. It was time for Kaplan, who was used to standing up for himself having worked in marketing and sales for large corporations and start-up companies, to take control.

He began researching his situation and immediately called Dr. Matt Sherman, an oncologist and genetic scientist at the Genetics Institute in Cambridge, Mass., the husband of a cousin. Sherman referred him to liver surgeon Jean Emond, then at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. Today, he heads the liver program at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York.

"He (Emond) removed about 75 percent of my liver," said Kaplan. He was told he didn't need chemotherapy but Kaplan, taking control of his life once again, decided to undergo chemotherapy and radiation, treatments done in Nashua but under the direction of physicians from the Dana Farber Cancer Center.

Now, four years later, Kaplan remains cancer-free and has founded "Against All Odds," a non-profit, cancer patient advocacy agency in

Nashua to give others information and help so they can try to beat the deadly disease.

He created the agency, which charges no fee, in November at the suggestion of a friend in the medical field to help cancer patients find the courage and a way to fight their cancer.

When a person is first diagnosed, Kaplan said, it is completely devastating not just for the individual but for his family as well.

"Our goal is to get people in a more positive role," he said. "We make people aware that people survive everyday that the doctors said wouldn't. We call those miracles. I'm perfectly happy to call it a miracle something that happens that isn't understood scientifically." Each year, he said, about 500,000 people in the United States alone die from cancer while another 1.3 million are diagnosed. The survival rate is up to 60 percent, he said.

Kaplan said he had an advantage when it came to his cancer treatment because an oncologist was in the family.

"I was lucky I got to the right guy and had the right people behind me," he said. "My family was absolutely remarkable ...we fought it as a family."

But in the four years since, he said he has learned "how to get to people you wouldn't know about."

Against All Odds, he said, was founded so "a newly diagnosed cancer patient has a place to go and talk to someone who's survived it." The intent, he said, is to sit down with cancer patients and their families for whatever amount of time it takes to get them as much information as possible on treatments available and, when necessary, find second and third opinions.

The objective is to train and assist patients to research medical options, referrals and advocacy services. The agency will not give any medical advice, but will work with the patient and his family to understand medical alternatives which exist.

"One of the worst things you can do is surrender," he said. "You're going to die if you surrender I ran the Boston Marathon about 12 to 13 years ago. Cancer is very similar. The easiest thing to do in a marathon is to stop. The same thing is true with cancer the easiest thing to do is stop fighting."

Kaplan has obtained state non-profit status for the agency, has put together a board of directors as well as an advisory board.

For the first six months, he said the agency (with an all-volunteer staff who have either survived cancer or are a relative of a cancer patient) will concentrate on helping people in New England and New York. Eventually, Kaplan said he hopes to open satellite agencies.

Kaplan is also working on obtaining funds and grants and makes presentations to groups of 25 or more, talking about his own battle and the services the agency provides. To reach Against All Odds, call 603-880-4118 or send e-mail to [info@againstallodds.org](mailto:info@againstallodds.org).