

[TRACK 5: SURVIVOR STORIES: MEDICARE]

Nate, 83 years old

[Narrator]

Nate, who is on Medicare, knew that a new kind of therapy had been developed for his type of cancer. The treatment was not typical of the therapy usually used for his cancer, and the doctor believed that Medicare would not pay for this treatment. The new treatment was not one of the options that were discussed with Nate and his daughter. Nate used the basic skills covered in other Cancer Survival Toolbox programs to stand up for his rights.

[Nate]

I know that my kind of cancer is very serious, and aside from a miracle, I know that a cure is not going to happen for me. But, I'd really like to try for some more time than I would have without any treatment at all. I think that exercising every day and eating right have helped me keep in good shape. I feel - and my daughter says I act - much younger than my 83 years. I learned about a new treatment that is just for my type of cancer. I really wanted to try to get this treatment, but my doctor would not even talk to me about it. I guess he thought Medicare would not pay for this new treatment, and he referred me to the hospice program. Well, I was not ready to die. I found another doctor who did listen to me, and took my state of health into consideration. I made it through the surgery just fine, and then we agreed to try the new treatment. So far, I have handled it pretty well. I know I'm not cured, but I am back to the swimming pool and the dance floor. The quality of my life is good.

[Narrator]

New treatments, such as monoclonal antibodies, new drugs, radiation sensitizing agents, and laser treatments, are becoming available all the time. It is OK to talk with your doctor about whether any of these new treatments is right for you or to ask another doctor for a second opinion. Nate and his daughter used many of the skills described in the Cancer Survival Toolbox to find the treatment that suited his needs best. First, he talked to his daughter, the doctor, the nurse, and the social worker about his wishes. He thought through things very carefully, and made his decision. He was clear that he very much wanted to at least consider getting this new therapy, and the new doctor helped Nate to understand that Medicare could pay at least some of the costs of the treatment even though it was considered experimental or a treatment still being researched. Medicare does have guidelines to help pay for research-related treatment. Even though talking about death and dying is hard for many people, most cancer survivors take comfort in knowing that they will not be a burden to their family and that they will maintain their sense of dignity even at the end of life. The use of hospice services, and using the Medicare or Insurance Hospice Benefit, offers ways to plan for the terminal phase of illness. Pre-planning like this helps many cancer survivors and their families deal with the end of life in a very positive way. Arlene and her family faced this together, and worked out plans that were valued by the whole family.