



Series: 1, Episode 1: Sex After Prostate Cancer – Guest: Glenn Consor

Jamie Bearse: Welcome to ZERO's new podcast Prostate Cancer Uncensored, a podcast produced by ZERO at the end of prostate cancer. Series one is all about sex. These conversations will be candid, nothing sugar coated. All questions, answers, and comments – no matter how uncomfortable – are all on the table. So like that song goes let's talk about sex, baby.

I'm Jamie Bearse, President and CEO at ZERO, and I'd like to welcome today's guest, Glenn Consor. Glenn is an Emmy Award winning caller analyst for the Washington Wizards of the NBA and a prostate cancer survivor and a teller of extremely unfiltered stories, which makes him a perfect guest for this prostate cancer podcast. Welcome, Glenn.

Glenn Consor: I am happy to be here, I think. [laughter] But I'm ready, I'm ready. If I could help anybody, that's why I'm here.

Bearse: Well, great. Well, thank you for joining us. Glenn, we'll get deep into your story, but let's not beat around the bush. Sex and prostate cancer is a touchy subject for most men, postop especially. Why do you think that is?

Consor: Well, I think there's a stigma behind it, you know, and I kind went through it when I was first diagnosed. You know, you're diagnosed with prostate cancer, you don't know what it is, you don't know what your prostate is, and you find out what it is. And then you go on the internet like everybody else, and it scares the pants off you because you don't know if you're going to be incontinent, you don't know if you're going to be able to have sex again, and there's all kinds of stuff that's on the internet, and it really scares you. And, it becomes an emotional thing. Men get prostate cancer at all different ages and all different, I guess, venues of their life – whether you're married or single – and it could affect your psyche. So, you know, you do all this reading, and you're a little bit intimidated.

Bearse: Yeah, I've worked in the prostate cancer cause for a number of years, and I've read, you know, many studies over the years that I've been involved in the cause. And one of the studies that I had read that blew me away, most of all, was that it came back that when faced with side effects, especially sexual dysfunction or death of prostate cancer, there was more fear of the sexual dysfunction, or I would just rather die than have my sex life taken away from me. So, I just was blown away by that, and I thought it was incredible.

Conzor: Right. You know, it's funny I talk to a lot of men, who approach me because of my platform with the Wizards, and we talk about that. And, a lot of men feel that way. I was different. I mean I wanted it out.

Bearse: So how did your first sexual experience go after surgery?

Conzor: Not great. Not great. I wasn't sure, you put so much pressure on yourself. And, I was unfamiliar with the medication that you need to take, which is another story that you and I'll get into in a little bit. But, you get so worried and emotional about how you perform. And, I was lucky. I'm married. I'm married for a long, long time, so my wife was incredibly sensitive and understood what I went through. But I can only imagine being single, and you meet someone you like, and you want to be intimate, that's a whole different ballgame.

So, the pressure you put on yourself, obviously, can make it go the wrong way. And, I don't think that was the case for me because I think maybe I even tried too early. So it wasn't great, and I'm like oh goodness, this is how it's going to be. But, it got better. So it was not successful.

Bearse: Got you. And, you talk about the pressure to get back at it after surgery. How long was it before you...?

Conzor: I mean I think, I listened to what the doctors were saying at the time. And, like I told you, with my running experience when the doctor said, don't run before six weeks, and I ran at five. So whatever he told me – I forgot what it was back then whether it's a month after surgery – I probably jumped in a week early, which had a lot to do with it because I'm always trying to...it's what hurts me, you know, I try to beat the system, I try to be aggressive with it.

So, I think if I'm to look back on it, I would really maybe go to courses with my wife, which we didn't do. And, hospitals and associations like ZERO offer these things. You know, they offer education. I didn't do any of that stuff.

Bearse: Did you talk with your wife on how things might be different after prostate cancer surgery?

Conzor: Yeah, we both weren't sure, and we both said we'll just kind of take it as it comes. From that standpoint, we didn't put a whole lot of pressure on ourselves.

Bearse: Well that's great that you have such a great relationship with your wife. I've talked to survivors before that get all up in their head about their first sexual experience or how sex is going to be after prostate cancer. And they get so up in their head that my wife's going to think like I'm not attracted to her anymore, or there's something psychologically going on, or that I just don't feel the same for her anymore.

Conzor: Yeah, I think you think about that. For me, I really didn't as much as the competitiveness in me wanted to fight every aspect of the disease. And that hurts me. It hurts me in business, too, sometimes. I get overly competitive or I...

Bearse: You can't do everything.

Conzor: Yeah, you can't do everything, and you've got to sometimes let your body heal, and I didn't accept that. So, I think that you asked me about the first time – it wasn't good, it didn't work. So I'm going oh my goodness. But I also knew that it would. I kind of forced myself to be patient.

Bearse: That's good you had the confidence that, eventually, it would come around.

Conzor: Right. Well, I also...you've got to think what your doctors tell you, too. My doctor told me that it couldn't have been more of a successful nerve-sparing operation, so that means that I was capable. So how much of my failings in the first time was emotional or putting too much pressure on myself. Nobody knows that answer, but I got to believe it was a big part of it.

Bearse: Right. As part of the series, as we go forward and talking about prostate cancer and sex, we'll be talking to a few different experts about the drugs and exercises that you can do, even after surgery, about what some prostate cancer patients can turn to. Now you had mentioned earlier that I'm going to guess you turned to Viagra after prostate cancer surgery. So, tell me about that. Did it go well/difficulties? What about that?

Conzor: I think...you and I have talked about this in the past. I mean, first of all, the therapy postop from my surgeon was to take Viagra every day for like three months or something like that or two months – I can't remember, it was five years ago – every day for three months. Do you know what that costs? That's like \$800 a month. And the money had nothing to do with the fact that I really didn't do that, I didn't do it. I took it when I thought I was going to be intimate with my wife. But I personally have a problem with the pharmaceutical companies that charge full price for prostate cancer survivors. I think that's wrong. It's not a recreational drug.

If the therapy from the surgeon is take one pill every two months or three months or whatever, because you've got to get blood circulating. And it is therapy. I didn't do it, so maybe it did hurt me. I don't know. But, the pharmaceutical companies need to wake up and say you know what, we've got to understand what's going on here; these aren't 25-year-old guys recreationally going out and using it. So, it's kind of like any other cancer medication or like Adderall, for example. A lot of people need Adderall to function versus a performance-enhancing drug where you need to take it. I mean there's got to be some type of law passed by somebody that says you can't charge...it's too expensive. And I could afford it, but I'm thinking about the guys that can't, you know, and then what?

Bearse: Yeah, \$800 is a month's worth of rent for somebody.

Conzor: Yeah, and I still didn't do it. I said you know what...it was almost like the principle of it, and that kind of goes back to my psyche. Well you know what, I don't need to spend \$800 maybe I'll spend \$400 because I could beat it because I'm me and I'm nuts. But, I mean I think from a therapy standpoint, I really bypassed a lot of the things that I probably should

have been doing and listening to whether it was couple's therapy for couples that are dealing with this, which we didn't do, or me going in to understand injections versus Viagra – I didn't do that. I just did Viagra, and now I'm trying Cialis for the first time. It gives me a headache, that stuff, which I don't love to take it, but I still do.

Bearse: Usually you use that excuse to get out of having sex – I have a headache.

Conzor: Right, that's right.

Bearse: Yeah, there's almost...it seems like there's a stigma there that insurance companies and Medicare will cover breast reconstruction surgery after a mastectomy with breast cancer. But when it comes to prostate cancer and trying to make a man whole again, if you will, it doesn't get covered. It's certainly an important issue.

You said you're five years out, five-year survivor now. What do you wish that you knew then that you know now going in?

Conzor: I think I probably should have embraced and engaged myself into the educational part of the postop sexual performance and education. I didn't do any of it. I wish I would have. It probably would have calmed me down. And that's what I would recommend to anybody – I mean just go do it. Go to therapy, go to couple's therapy, understand what it means, it's fine. Take a Viagra or Cialis once a day like you're supposed to. It's almost like a vitamin. I didn't do it. So I look back on all the little different techniques that they tell you – whether it's an injection – all the things to help you get back to normal, I wish I would have paid attention to that stuff. I didn't do it.

Bearse: Now, did you eventually go to sex therapy and couple's therapy and all that?

Conzor: No.

Bearse: You just ended up figuring it out more or less.

Conzor: Figuring it more or less successfully or unsuccessfully or somewhere in the middle, yeah.

Bearse: So you're saying that...if somebody's listening to this, you'd say don't exactly follow my example.

Conzor: Don't do what I did, no. But I think it also correlates to anyone that has a problem with anything. It's okay to go talk to somebody.

Bearse: I thought you were going to say don't do what you do if you ever have a problem.

Conzor: Right, don't do what I do; do the opposite, right. Because my kids do the opposite, which makes me angry. And I worry about my boys with this, too, that's a whole other story. But no, I think...I had to do things at my own pace, and that's part of my crazy. Everybody's got a crazy. Part of my crazy is if someone says I can't do something, I'm going to try to

prove...my wife makes fun of me with this stuff. Because like if they say well, do not enter, I'm entering, and that's my problem. I almost approached prostate cancer surgery the same way. But fortunately, I got very lucky because I had a great surgeon who had great hands. So, from that standpoint, I think you can't be afraid to talk about the emotional aspect, the sexual aspect of this disease because it's a big deal. And I'm still going through it.

Bearse: Now, if you could put into one word, what would sum up the emotional aspect of where you are now with prostate cancer? You said you're still almost getting over it or still adapting to it. So, how would you sum it up on how you're feeling about it these days? Where are you emotionally?

Conzor: I think now that things have settled down a little bit, I'm almost more willing to listen to other people – and maybe some of my friends now or urologists – and listen to what could help me benefit whether it's sexually or physically or whatever. So, I would listen more.

Bearse: Yeah, with everybody that's listening, what advice would you have around prostate cancer and getting diagnosed and even when it comes to prostate cancer and getting sort of back in the saddle with sex? What wisdom would you pass on to someone?

Conzor: I think you have to let it breathe. You can't be so emotional, and it's easy for me to say. It's like when you're – it's a joke – but it's like when you're having an argument with your wife, and you say calm down. Well, you can't tell someone to calm down, it doesn't work. But, to some degree, it's very similar to this, at least it was that way for me. I wanted to fight it out, I was overly emotional, but in a way, that didn't show. But inside I was worried, inside I was concerned, inside I wanted to be able to be intimate with my wife. It is a big deal. So, my best advice would be really to take a step back and not put so much pressure on yourself and listen and get educated. That's the key.

I think as time goes on, there's more opportunities and educational opportunities to help you have intimacy and figure out...and again, like I said, everybody's different. Figure out what works for you. Don't try to figure it out yourself; try to get help. That would be my best advice.

Bearse: Glenn, you mentioned that you've been a mentor to many other men who've been impacted by prostate cancer. Tell me about what was one of them that was most moving for you or had the most impact on you?

Conzor: Well, so many people call me. I'm on Twitter. I'm on a lot of social media sites. It does say in my bio, aside from my broadcasting, that I'm a prostate cancer survivor. So I do, on Twitter, get people that will say hey, can you tell me what you think about where I'm at. My PSA is at a 3, and they'll say what did you go through. So from that standpoint, that's pretty cool. And that's kind of random people. But, being the honorary chair for the prostate cancer race, in DC, this year – which was a couple of months ago I think now, at this point – to me, one of the most rewarding things were after my speech this year, five men (it was actually during the course of the race) came over and said...of course, they asked me about the Wizards and what happened this year because we didn't have a great year.

And then, all of a sudden, they'd say I don't have prostate cancer, I was here last year with someone else. And, because of your speech, I went and got tested. Because that's, obviously, the big component to my talk, aside from the other things, is to get tested because that could save your life. And the guy said...and I would always say well are you well are you okay? Yeah, I'm good, but I went and got tested, which I probably wouldn't of. And that, to me, meant a lot because you never know who might go and get tested and say oops these numbers are a little sketchy, and maybe I might have a problem.

Bearse: Yeah, and there's such a stigma around prostate cancer you can only imagine how many questions did they put in their head about the Wizards before they got up enough courage to be able to tell you, and I got tested for prostate cancer. To say that.

Conzor: Well, we didn't have a great year last year, so I was hoping they'd get to the prostate cancer questions quicker than they did.

Bearse: That's right. You've told us, too, that you've had another caller commenter in the NBA come to you to talk to you about their prostate cancer experience.

Conzor: Yeah, I mean it was really a surreal moment. Because I remember when I was first diagnosed – and I think I mentioned earlier – that I was diagnosed during the season. And I'm not going to mention any names, but there's another analyst, who is about 6'10, 280 pounds, ex-NBA player...

Bearse: Now that I found macho.

Conzor: Yeah, that's macho, right. There you go. But being 6'2 and 215 whatever, it doesn't meet your standards.

Bearse: Beating prostate cancer and meeting it head on, I think you're macho.

Conzor: Right, there you go. And from you, that means a lot. So I remember telling somebody – I think I was in like the media room or something – telling someone from the Wizards that I was just diagnosed with prostate cancer. And this guy really didn't talk to me. We're friends like a lot of analysts and the play-by-play guys are friends, but this guy – through the years – was kind of standoffish, and he was a little intimidating, actually.

So, I remember telling this guy, and I remember walking out, and he taps me on the shoulder and says did I just hear you say you were just diagnosed with prostate cancer? And I said yes. And he goes well, I had the surgery. And from that moment on – he was talking to me about it – but from that moment on, he became a mentor. He would check on me, and I think it was really late in the season. But when the season ended – and I think in June I had my surgery – he would call and make sure I was okay. And we became very, very close. The fact that this podcast is about intimacy and sexual relations pre- and post-operation. I remember going back the following year, and during all that time we became really good friends. It really was amazing how much he helped me.

So, I had the surgery in June, so it probably was like in February of the following year, I remember we were playing his team, and we're walking up how you doing? Good. And we're walking to our positions, and usually the radio positions of the opposing teams are very close to each other. And, we're walking up the steps getting to our position, and he goes so, how are you doing? So I go I'm doing okay, I'm figuring things out. And he goes no really, how are you doing? And I go well, like what do you mean? I just said I'm doing okay I think. Okay incontinence wise and the other stuff I'm trying to figure out. And he goes well, what are you trying to figure out? Again, we're walking up to broadcast a game, so this is...

Bearse: ...game's on your mind...

Conzor: The game's on my mind, I'm not thinking about the other stuff. And he goes well, what are you having a problem with? So I said well, I don't know, I'm trying to figure it all out with the pills. I don't like the pill, and it gives me a headache, and I don't know how much to take. Like I told you earlier, I didn't really follow all the instructions that everybody told me to do. So he goes I got it figured out. I go well what do you mean you got it figured out? And he goes I got it figured out, and I'll share it with you. I go well, tell me how you got it figured out. He goes I just asked my wife. And I go huh? What do you mean you just ask your wife? He goes yeah. And I go you mean with the milligrams of what you're taking? And he goes yeah. And I go what are you talking about? He goes well, I just ask her if she wants Kobe or Shaq. And then like the game stated, and I was on the mute button because I was laughing the whole time. And then he was holding up signs Kobe and Shaq...

Bearse: ...throughout the game.

Conzor: ...throughout the game. And it was like a wonderful moment of sincerity, concern, and humor all wrapped together. He's been a great mentor to me.

Bearse: So it sounds like that was a real turning point in your prostate cancer experience to sort of make that relationship.

Conzor: Yeah, it kind of relaxed me a little bit saying you know what, I've still got to play around with this stuff, I've still got to figure it out, and I will.

Bearse: Great. So, did you take his advice?

Conzor: No. No, I did. I'm still...it's an ongoing process, you're still trying to figure it out.

Bearse: You've been listening to an open and candid discussion about sex after prostate cancer. I want to thank my guest, Glenn Consor, for sharing his journey with us. To learn more about prostate cancer or ZERO at the end of prostate cancer and to learn more about this podcast, go to zerocancer.org/podcasts.