Emerities Newsletter, Winter 2015

Georgia State University Emeriti Association

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My Experiences with Colon Cancer Surgery

Charles M. Williams, Professor Emeritus of Computer Information Systems, J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Paying attention to your body is one of the basic tenets of my “Wellness Stick-to-it-ivity” philosophy, and it’s precisely what I didn’t do.

In mid-March, at the age of 82, I was feeling great but slowing down and getting increasingly out of breath doing ever lower-intensity workouts, when I got it through my thick skull I might be suffering from “tired blood.” Google informed me that meant I might have anemia and might, accordingly, consider visiting my family doctor.

So I made an appointment with him, which resulted in my being rushed to the hospital the next day to get blood transfusions, which perked me up a lot, and a colonoscopy, which indicated I had a cancerous growth in my colon that caused the hemorrhaging that made me anemic. Had I been more knowledgeable about wellness matters, I might have detected the intestinal hemorrhaging myself.

I returned home from the hospital after staying three days and two nights, then went back the next day for a two-and-a-half-hour operation that removed the cancerous lobe of my colon, reattached the remaining section to my lower intestine and removed nearby lymph nodes.

I am pleased to report the operation appears to have been a total success.

Five days after the operation, I walked out of the hospital unaided and returned home pain-free, where I had no trouble with stairs or the steep driveway down to the mailbox. I got up the courage to try taking mile-long walks on the hilly streets in my neighborhood a few days later.

Recovery

One week after surgery, I visited my family doctor, thanked him for getting me into the hospital and apologized for not following his advice to get a colonoscopy last fall. He was astonished by my rapid recovery.

A week later, I paid a visit to my surgeon, thanked him for his terrific work, and told him I was walking briskly but keeping my mouth shut to avoid heavy breathing. He replied that I should open my mouth and get moving. He was ecstatic about my rapid recovery and attributed it to my physical fitness and low body fat.

By late April I had progressed to the extent that I could race-walk a mile at a pace that was within striking distance of where I had been a year ago. I participated in the weekly, 1500-meter race-walk competition at the Atlanta Track Club All-Comers track and field meets that began on May 6.

Obesity

During my eight-day stay at the hospital, I became increasingly appalled by the amazingly high percentage of obese patients. It seems to me that most of those folks were in the hospital and had undergone surgery after not paying attention to anything remotely connected to fitness or wellness.

I was delighted to observe, however, that the hospital staff had trimmed down a lot from what they were last fall when my wife had a bladder infection. The doctor had complimented her then on her physical condition and lack of body fat.

My mission now is getting the message out that using one’s own initiative to improve one’s health actually works. We cannot buy good health, and it won’t magically appear.

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Those of us who are old enough to retire recall that every movie we used to see in the theater began with the words “Preview of Coming Attractions.” This is a preview of a movie that has been years in the making, and is coming soon to a television station near you.

For the past four years, I have worked with former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, his daughter Andrea, a talented group of filmmakers and a large cast of others to make a film. The title of the film is “Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta.” In late January, Georgia Public Broadcasting will air the first half of the two-hour documentary we have all worked so hard to make.

The story of the making of the film is almost as interesting as the film itself. Some years ago, Ambassador Young was asked to speak to a younger generation of leaders in Atlanta. He began telling the audience how the city of Atlanta we know today came into being. The story spanned generations of public leaders, starting with Mayor Bill Hartsfield, who formed a partnership with black leaders and white downtown businessmen to deal with important issues facing the city. It is a story of remarkable continuity about how things were done in Atlanta, but one that the younger audience had never heard.

This was the beginning of a project that would also enable Young to share the story of the shaping of Atlanta with eager audiences of leaders from other cities.

Soon the dean of the Andrew Young School, Mary Beth Walker, and Andrea Young, the executive director of the Andrew J. Young Foundation, formed a partnership to tell the story of the shaping of modern Atlanta. They asked me to join the team that would make the film and write the book. With a few slides and handouts, Ambassador Young, his daughter and I began telling the Atlanta story to a variety of university and community audiences in Washington, New Orleans, San Francisco, Indianapolis and other cities. The response we received made us feel the film would be a hit.

Andrew Young and Monica Pearson provide the narration for the documentary. Both are seasoned professionals: Pearson is retired from a distinguished career as a local television news anchor, while Young is an Emmy-winning filmmaker. The film examines the transition of Atlanta from a small southern town at the end of World War II to a city of international importance after the 1996 Summer Olympics. For the book, we interviewed 60 people, and the documentary crew returned to film more than half that number. Leaders in New Orleans and Birmingham also provided comparisons with the “Atlanta way” of doing things.

What was my role in all of this? I was the script reader, fact checker and occasional commentator on what was going on in making the policy decisions that shaped Atlanta. I have learned so much about how city elections are won, what representatives in Congress can do for their constituents and how Atlanta’s mayors have worked with others to shape policies that have made Atlanta a special place. I have seen the first cut of the film and look forward to popping the popcorn and settling down to watch the first hour on Georgia Public Broadcasting. The second hour is scheduled for later in the spring. Stay tuned.
One of the most exciting aspects of retirement is the freedom to undertake new activities and adventures, and the Georgia State Emeriti excel in this regard. In March 2015, the Emeriti Association will unveil a new event at which members share their activities and adventures, this time emphasizing travel. This event will take place in association with the Georgia State Authors Series. On March 5, following the presentation, “Improbable Women, Five Who Explored the Middle East,” by Bill Cotterman (11 a.m., Colloquium Room, Library South) and a light lunch, three emeriti professors will present brief slide shows on recent trips: Anne Page Mosby on her travels to Australia and New Zealand, Rankin Cooter on his trip to southern Africa and Terry Frey on his tour of Cuba. These presentations will be exciting and informative, even for those of us who are not able to travel, and similar events will be planned in the future, emphasizing travel and novel activities in which our members are engaged. Please join us on March 5 for a couple of hours of interest, food and fellowship.
My Experiences with Colon Cancer Surgery
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TV Interview

Piedmont Atlanta Healthcare’s television interview of me in May was featured in the August edition of “Living Better” and is posted on the GSU Emeriti Association website.

After performing emergency prostate surgery on me in June, my surgeon gave my physical condition the thumbs-up in October.

I’ve recovered much of my upper-body strength and physical endurance by heavy lifting work in the backyard, gym workouts and race-walking on neighborhood roads. And I’m back to hiking up Kennesaw Mountain on the steep trail from Burnt Hickory Road to regain my stamina for race-walk competition.

Charles Williams competing in a 5K Racewalk in 2007. He won the bronze for the 75-79 age group
FEBRUARY
Basketball Game
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21 • Noon
GSU Sports Arena

Come and support the Panthers as they play Appalachian State University. Additional details to come.

MARCH
Author Series
THURSDAY, MARCH 5 • 11 a.m.
Library South, Eighth Floor, Colloquium Room

Professor William Cotterman will discuss his book, “Improbable Women: Five Who Explored the Middle East.”

MARCH
Emeriti Travels
THURSDAY, MARCH 5 • 12:30 p.m.
Library South, Eighth Floor, Colloquium Room

Immediately following the author series, join us for a light lunch and presentation on recent Emeriti travels.

MARCH
School of Music Recital
THURSDAY, MARCH 26 • 12:30 p.m.
Florence Kopleff Recital Hall

Join us for an a concert featuring student performers from the School of Music followed by a reception in the Green Room.

APRIL
Tour of Oakland Cemetery
TUESDAY, APRIL 21 • 10:30 a.m. (tour) • Noon (lunch)

Join us for a docent-led tour by Teryl Frey of Oakland Cemetery followed by lunch on your own at Six Feet Under. Free parking is available in a lot just outside the front gate or along the street on Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and Oakland Avenue. If parking inside the cemetery, pull your vehicle to the right and off any asphalt paved roadway, leaving space for cars to pass.

MAY
Author Series
WEDNESDAY, MAY 20 • 11 a.m.
Library South, Eighth Floor, Colloquium Room

Hear from another Georgia State author. Additional details to come.
The IRA Charitable Rollover Extension for 2014

The IRA Charitable Rollover is legislation that was reinstated in the middle of December only to expire again on January 1, 2015. This legislation previously expired at the end of 2013 but has been enacted, expired and reinstated many times since 2006. The IRA Charitable Rollover permitted an IRA owner, aged 70½ or older, to give up to $100,000 to charity to avoid paying federal income taxes on the distributions. The rules required that (a) the IRA owner be aged 70½ or older, (b) the funds come from a traditional or Roth IRA – not a 401(k) or 403(b) – and (c) the funds come directly from the plan administrator and not pass through the plan participant. The guidelines provided that required minimum distributions (RMD) could be used to satisfy an IRA Charitable Rollover. The IRA Charitable Rollover is a valuable tool to use to make charitable gifts. And, it is particularly valuable for traditional IRA owners who do not need the account money to live on, but who must take out a RMD each year once they reach that septuagenarian deadline.

In mid-December 2014, Congress passed legislation that reinstated 55 tax provisions that expired at the end of 2013, including the IRA Charitable Rollover. It did so for calendar year 2014 only. President Obama then signed it into law, leaving donors little time to act on making charitable donations from their IRA assets. Because the IRA Charitable Rollover was only be reinstated for 2014, we are now back to where we were and without the ability to give from your IRA directly to a charity to avoid paying income taxes.

Until the legislation is reinstated, our advice will remain the same. If you are required to take an RMD by 2015 year-end, and/or want to use these distributions to make a charitable gift to Georgia State, do so by giving the distributions to the Georgia State University Foundation directly from your plan administrator. That way, if the legislation is ultimately reinstated, temporarily or permanently, you will be in the position to report the distribution and note that it isn’t taxable on your IRS return. If the legislation is not signed into law, you will be no worse off for you could (a) report the distribution to the IRS, (b) pay the taxes as you would have to do in any event and (c) take an income tax charitable deduction if you itemize your deductions. We advise this with one cautionary note – DO NOT make a contribution in excess of your RMD, for to do so could cause the entire distribution to constitute taxable income if the IRA Charitable Rollover is not reinstated for 2015. This would subject you to negative tax treatment.

If you are interested in learning more about the IRA Charitable Rollover to plan for calendar year 2015, please contact me at the numbers below or by email, and be sure to check with your financial adviser to make sure such a gift is the most tax efficient gift vehicle for you and fits in your estate plan.

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