

STEPS TO BRIDGING THE GULF BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND RESEARCHERS

Mark A. Harris

Why the Gulf Exists: Insights from My Experience

COMMUNITY

- Distrust of the medical field based on history and personal experience
- Culture and tradition
- Not enough knowledge to be proactive including knowledge of clinical trials
- Feeling used and abandoned at project end when researchers leave

RESEARCHERS

- Going into communities with research projects without first building close relationships
- Not providing enough medical information for the community that is easily understood
- Not going “deep” into the community to engage with those that don’t normally interact with them
- Not being more systematic about recruitment for clinical trials
- “Savior complex”

Seeing Things Differently: Lessons After Diagnosis

Cancer is often absent in everyday conversation in Black and Brown communities

- Many people diagnosed with cancer choose not to share their diagnosis with others
- Among men, silence is especially common, often due to:
 - a. A desire not to be perceived as weak – shaped by culture, tradition, and machismo.
 - b. A sense of responsibility to remain the “rock” of the family — the source of strength, not the cause of worry or fear.

The word cancer is frequently only used when someone dies.

The silence reinforces the idea that cancer equals death – even though today, more people survive cancer than die from it.

Being the Change: What I’m Doing

- Being visible and vocal to show that there is life after a cancer diagnosis
- Working to normalize conversations about cancer by telling my story as much as I can
- Providing education to increase awareness in the communities
- Discussing healthcare history and pointing out the process improvements that were made
- Inspiring others to be more proactive about their health
- Being available to support and advise those (and their families) that have been diagnosed with cancer
- Partnering with community organizations like the Foster Grandparents and Senior Fitness classes to enlist their help to spread health awareness since senior voices are trusted
- Becoming an advocate of organizations that research cancer and who make cancer related policy



Legislative Advocate

Lobbying on Capitol Hill last 3 years with **ZERO Prostate Cancer**

Research Advocate

Bringing lived experience to the research process

Healthcare Advocate

Patient consultant with pharmaceutical companies and patients

Community Advocate

Results of sharing my story with the community

To whom it may concern:

Please allow me to express our sentiments regarding the effect Mark Harris had on our prostate cancer journey. I use the word “our” because being married for almost 40 years we are sharing this experience. The phrase “timing is everything” is the perfect way to describe the impact that Mark made on our lives post-op, day one. We did not know what to think when my husband was first diagnosed and knew even less on what to expect once he emerged from the operating room. While sitting alone with my thoughts I ran across words written by Mark regarding his day one diagnosis of prostate cancer. I could barely believe what I was reading and the impeccable timing. Over the course of a week, Mark’s transparency regarding his journey opened my eyes and increased my knowledge to better help my husband. I was committed to share his words with my husband. With each passing day the light in my husband’s eyes began to shine brighter and his determination to not allow a diagnosis to write his story became evident. Mark’s words revealed the importance for men to share their story. Without provocation, my husband began asking every man he encountered if they knew their PSA number. I must admit it was a little awkward at times, but necessary, this credit goes to Mark and his determination to impart prostate awareness to all who will listen. We listened.

Mark helped to shine the light of hope and knowledge into our lives. We are forever thankful for him and his willingness to be an outspoken advocate for all men. This is a conversation that must continue, knowledge is key, and execution is imperative. Mark provides words that give hope. His positivity is infectious and his passion and commitment to educating all men is evident. Many times, people do not realize the silent impact they are making on others, without reservation we share that Mark made a resounding impact in our lives, for which we will always stand in the background cheering his efforts on.

Regards,
Gregory L. and Tracey M. McKinney

"A friend recently told me that a talk I gave a couple of years ago had a real impact on him. He said, 'It's been three weeks since my surgery — and I'm doing well.'"

Darryl L. Johnson
Feb 25 · 🌐

Men, let's take our health seriously! My brother Mark is cool, suave, and debonair (never knew that was a b not a v). And thank you brother for all that you do. I am healthier when I am in your presence. Gonna start walking!

Mark A Harris
Feb 23 · 🌐

One of the best compliments I have received is when a friend said "Mark you don't look like a punk when you talk about your cancer journey." My immediate thought was well I don't care how you think I look but after thinking about it more I realized the importance of this statement. He saw that I was still a cool, suave, intelligent brother ... oh, wait, he didn't say these things but it was probably what he was thinking and who am I to argue. 😊 Anyway, the point is he saw that I wasn't less of a man, instead I was still Mark. That's the main reason that I'm so vocal about my experience, I want to be the example of what a healthy, fit man looks like. During a [Johnson & Johnson](#) interview I was asked how do we get the young men to be more proactive about their health and I replied that it's tough because they don't have role models. We know that children imitate what they see as opposed to what they hear. I was on a call when I heard what I've heard many, many times before but the light bulb came on this time...women are more proactive about their health. The light bulb was... daughters will emulate what they see their mothers do and they boys will emulate what their fathers do...don't talk about their health and aren't usually proactive about their health. So, my assignment is to be a role model by saying and showing how it's done and to support others who choose to do so. Blessed.

