



## Podcast Transcript A Patient's Story: Karen Oppen

### HOST:

Please tell us a little bit about yourself—where you're from and what you like to do.

### KAREN OPPEN:

I'm from Sacramento, California, and I have two daughters—one's in college, one's in high school—and a husband. I don't work. I stay home and I've taken care of my children. And, my children are very involved in sports, so I've always been involved with them, their sports, and involved with their schools. A lot of volunteer work.

### HOST:

And when were you diagnosed with multiple myeloma and what were the circumstances surrounding your diagnosis?

### KAREN OPPEN:

I was diagnosed in, well, in the fall of 2001 I went in for just an annual exam—I was feeling fine and always had a perfect checkup—and my sedimentation rate was very high and I was anemic. So, my doctor at that time decided to pursue it and see why this was happening.

After a series of tests, it probably took a couple of months to really be diagnosed. We kind of knew going into it that it was leaning towards multiple myeloma. But the final was when I had the bone marrow biopsy and that was in January of 2002 and the results were yes, I had multiple myeloma.

### HOST:

Had you ever even heard of multiple myeloma before you were diagnosed?

### KAREN OPPEN:

Never. Never heard of it. Although, my doctor—when I was having these tests to see why I had the high sed rate and was anemic—he said to me “it could be this” and he named several things that it could have been, and they would stick in my mind and I would go home and try to look it up on the computer or look it up in a medical dictionary. So I knew a little bit. I knew that when they said multiple myeloma it didn't sound good.

So, I got teary-eyed and the doctor said, “What do you know about this?” and I said, “Well, it doesn't sound too good. If it was something else, it might have been better, but...”

So I did know a little bit but not much.



**HOST:**

And so what kind of treatment have you had since you were diagnosed?

**KAREN OPPER:**

I went to a local doctor and then he suggested I go see Dr. Tricot. And he started me with the Total Therapy II. And I had two stem cell transplants and I started in 2002, and I had my second transplant in January of 2003. And I went on consolidation, some more chemo after the transplants. And then I went on maintenance.

And in the summer of 2007, my myeloma markers started to kind of elevate a little bit so he kept an eye on me and then we decided that I should continue another type of treatment so that's what I'm starting now.

**HOST:**

So how are you feeling today and how has the quality of your life been?

**KAREN OPPER:**

Well, I started chemo on Monday. This is Wednesday. I feel fine. Knock on wood. I feel fine.

I have not had any problems other than a chemo would make me feel kind of sick to my stomach or nauseous. But, other than that, I have done everything that I have always done. I work out. I run. I was walking eight miles a day with my girlfriend just until recently. Or, three times a week I was walking eight miles a day.

And, I feel great. I have been able to enjoy my life and enjoy my family.

**HOST:**

What would you say is the most surprising or most interesting thing that you've learned about myeloma?

**KAREN OPPER:**

Well, I've learned that it is a disease that they're discovering more and more about. I mean, if you're going to have to have cancer this is one that they are doing so much research on and there's so many new drugs that are coming out and people are living longer and longer with this disease that I'm thinking that there's going to be a cure. Or, it's going to be a disease that you treat like you treat a diabetic where you take a pill and you just continue your life. I think that they're going to have a breakthrough soon.

**HOST:**

What kinds of things help you find the inner strength you need to get through each step of the treatment process?

**KAREN OPPER:**

I—oh gosh—I think it's my family. My kids and my husband. I just want to be strong for them and set a good example for them. So it's my children, my husband, and my friends. I've had really good support from everybody. I'm just so lucky.

**HOST:**

Is there any advice you'd give to someone who has just found out that he or she has multiple myeloma?

**KAREN OPPER:**

I think the advice that I would tell people—and I had a sister-in-law that was diagnosed a couple years ago with breast cancer—and I say to people like that, "Don't go online and do your own research because a lot of it isn't true or it's outdated and it just upsets people."

It happened to me at the beginning. I was trying to look up a lot of information online and some of it's false and some of it's misleading. What I finally did was I kind of had a team of researchers. My husband and then this close family friend that understood it really well and they were my researchers. That way I didn't get stressed over reading. Because you read so many negative things.

I think that would be my advice. To stay off the computer and let other people do it for you.

**HOST:**

Is there anything else you'd like to tell perhaps another patient or a caregiver of a myeloma patient?

**KAREN OPPER:**

I guess, you know, there's good days and bad days but for me I've just, like I said, I've lived my life. I've done everything that I would have done. It's not like I had to stay at home. I'm a busy person, and I still have the strength to run around and do everything.

Just, you know, keep a good attitude. I think that helps a lot.

**HOST:**

Okay, well thank you so much for your time and for joining us today.

**KAREN OPPER:**

Thank you.



*To find out more about multiple myeloma and the Myeloma Program at Huntsman Cancer Institute, visit <http://www.fightmyeloma.org>.*