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Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Colon Cancer, Ostomy Surgery; Three Strikes That Will Not Stop This Survivor from Cycling Coast to Coast

Bob Baker, an ulcerative colitis and color cancer survivor, now living with an ostomy, will leave Stamford, CT on April 16th on his bicycle, starting a 4,000-mile, 3-month journey that will take him cross country to Seattle, Washington. As Baker will tell you, "By making this ride, I want to show that it is absolutely possible to live an active, healthy lifestyle after ostomy surgery. I plan to use this event to talk about important health issues like Inflammatory Bowel Disease, prevention of Colon Cancer and the quality of life one can attain with an Ostomy."

Baker knows from personal experience that ostomy surgery is often perceived as something really bad, something to be avoided at all cost. But for those who truly need it, it can be a lifesaver. Acceptance takes time and he knows that what you thought would be the most horrific thing you ever had to endure, often turns out to be an incredible blessing, even a turning point in continued or renewed health. For him it was the ultimate gift. Through this tour he wants to reach out to new patients and their families to give them hope and to get the attention of those who are putting off surgery because they believe it to be physically limiting and socially unacceptable.

At key points along the route, in cooperation with medical centers and local civic organizations, Baker will address the issues of stigma and misinformation that keeps otherwise-intelligent people from making the lifesaving decision to undergoing ostomy surgery. He will also use these awareness-promoting events to raise much needed funds for public outreach educational programs developed by the United Ostomy Associations of America. "By going public with my story, I hope to put a national spotlight on ostomy and at the same time raise significant funds to help UOAA."

About Bob Baker

"As a youth, I was healthy, happy, active and very athletic until one day, when I was about 15 years old, my health took an unexpected turn. I developed bloody diarrhea very suddenly and it wouldn't go away. Scared and embarrassed, I was brought to my family physician, who diagnosed me with ulcerative colitis (UC). I had no idea then, that I would have to deal with this incurable bowel disease for the next 27 years. Unfortunately, due to the life situation I was in at the time, the disease went virtually untreated for nearly 12 years until I finally saw a specialist. At his suggestion, I started steroid therapy and my health improved enough to allow me to marry, start a family and open and operate a small business. Let me just tell you that living with uncontrollable diarrhea is no picnic, especially when I needed to go to the bathroom as much as 20 times a day. Not to mention, UC puts a person like me at high risk for colon cancer. In fact, at age 40, I was diagnosed with stage 2 colon cancer. At that time, I was given the option to have just the tumor removed or to have my entire colon removed to cure me of UC and cancer with ostomy surgery. I chose to have them remove just the section of the colon where the tumor was. Looking back I realize the decision was made out of fear and ignorance. After a relatively speedy recovery, I was cured of cancer but still had UC; it took another two years of ill health to convince me that I needed to accept the idea of the ostomy surgery. Now, after 7 years of living with an ostomy, I realize what a turning point I was at when I made that decision, and I have enjoyed almost unbelievably renewed health and vigor with my new lease on life."

About Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic (ongoing) disease of the colon, or large intestine. The disease is marked by inflammation and ulceration of the colon mucosa, or innermost lining. Tiny open sores, or ulcers, form on the surface of the lining, where they bleed and produce pus and mucus. Because the inflammation makes the colon empty frequently, symptoms typically include diarrhea (sometimes bloody) and often crampy abdominal pain. It is estimated that as many as 700,000 Americans have ulcerative colitis, with males and females affected equally. On average, people are diagnosed with ulcerative colitis in their mid-30s, although the disease can occur at any age. Men are more likely than women to be diagnosed with ulcerative colitis in their 50s and 60s. There is a greater incidence of ulcerative colitis among whites than in non-whites, and a higher incidence in Jews than in non-Jews. Another 700,000 Americans are affected by Crohn's Disease, an inflammatory bowel disease that can affect all parts of the digestive tract.

About Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Almost 150,000 people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer this year, and over 50,000 of them will die. But colorectal cancer is also one of the most preventable cancers – over 90% of all cases could be prevented through proper screening methods. Colorectal cancer is the most common cause of ostomy surgery in the United States.

About Ostomy Surgery

Ostomy surgery is performed on more than 125,000 people in the United States annually. Of these surgeries approximately 45% are temporary, lasting from 3 to 6 months. There are four types of urinary and fecal diversion surgeries: Colostomy, Ileostomy, Urostomy and Continent Diversion. In Ileostomy surgery the entire large intestine is removed, the end of the small intestine brought through the abdominal wall, and a plastic pouching system used to collect the body's waste. The primary reasons for ostomy surgery include colon cancer, inflammatory bowel diseases such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's Disease, bladder cancer, trauma and birth abnormalities. Ostomy patients range in age from newborns to seniors in their 90's. There are over 750,000 people in the United States who have an ostomy.

About the UOAA

Each year the 125,000 people who face ostomy surgery will benefit from the services of the United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc. The UOAA is an association of 320 affiliated, non-profit, support groups nationwide who are committed to the improvement of the quality of life of people who have, or will have, an intestinal or urinary diversion. These support groups are staffed by volunteers who have experienced ostomy or related surgery. UOAA is dedicated to the provision of information, advocacy and service to, and for, its affiliated support groups, their members and the intestinal/urinary diversion community at large. Service is provided to an estimated US ostomy population of nearly 750,000, a number that more than doubles when you take into consideration the families and caregivers of these ostomy patients. UOAA has the nation's most comprehensive ostomy website: www.ostomy.org. The most important program of UOAA is its Patient Visiting Program where requests for a trained ostomy visitor to meet one-on-one with a new ostomy patient for peer counseling are made to one of UOAA's affiliated support groups (with the consent of a doctor for patients in a hospital setting), by e-mailing UOAA directly at info@ostomy.org or by calling 800-826-0826. UOAA publishes *The Phoenix* magazine on a quarterly basis. Subscriptions are available at www.phoenixuoaa.org

Bob Baker refers to his ride as "The Phoenix Tour". The Phoenix is the mythical bird that is consumed in fire and then takes flight anew. UOAA embraces the motto "Reborn from the ashes of disease". Baker is an active volunteer of UOAA having served as President of his local support group and as Vice President of the National Organization.

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