

Live long enough to cash in your 401(k):

STAYING HEALTHY & surviving any diagnosis

The big day has finally arrived. Your boss shakes your hand and wishes you well. Your colleagues gather around a cake and make small talk about landing the big fish in your retirement, or joke about what you'll do now.

A cardboard box is filled with the contents of your desk: family pictures, trinkets, and stale candy. Your name is off the cubicle, and you wonder what you'll do for the next 30 years.

One more stop: the benefits office.

**There you will be asked:
How do you want to receive your pension?
What does this have to do with your health?**

Dr. Edward T. Creagan says, "Plenty. Because before you can make any decision about your pension distribution, you need to seek the guidance of skilled professionals, such as a financial planner, a tax adviser, an attorney, and—believe it or not—a doctor."

In the newly released second edition of his book *How Not to Be My Patient: A Physician's Secrets for Staying Healthy and Surviving Any Diagnosis*, Dr. Creagan, a cancer specialist, explains why: "Let's suppose you are generally healthy, with normal blood pressure, no diabetes or heart disease, and your mother lived to a ripe old age. For you, the annuity of a fixed amount every month becomes a reasonable option. You could very well 'outlive' the lump sum option you are presented along with the 'gold watch'—and laugh all the way to the bank."

"On the other hand, you may have a serious medical condition, such as cancer, and let's suppose that your expected survival is limited. In that situation, a reasonable option would be door number 2, the lump sum. You and your family would work with professionals to set investments in motion to take care of your family," he advises.

Retirement decisions are not always as obvious as this. But, Dr. Creagan observes, you will be making decisions about when to take Social Security and when to tap into your 401(k).

"From a practical standpoint, I suggest you see your doctor around the time your retirement is planned. Some minor blood abnormalities or trivial symptoms might lead to a CT scan or EKG, and then to a diagnosis of a life-threatening illness. In that case, your financial options would be clear," he suggests along with much more wise advice for anyone about taking control of their health in this updated second edition of the highly acclaimed book.

