

World Cancer Day – Monday 4 February 2019 ‘I am and I will campaign’

A snap shot of Derek’s cancer journey so far

Derek had been experiencing problems for several months and like most men he was reluctant to visit a GP. I made the appointment and he attended. The first GP he saw thought his problem was due to an inguinal hernia, although we both knew it was unlikely, he was referred for an ultrasound.

When I rang the surgery to enquire if the results were back I was told it was not a hernia but for Derek to make a non-urgent appointment with any GP, which I did.

When he saw the second GP I took along a comprehensive list of symptoms. That GP acknowledged there was a lot going on and referred Derek for a non-urgent abdominal ultrasound.

While we waited for the appointment for the scan he deteriorated to the point that he was having frequent falls, was confused, he couldn't hold a kettle or even a newspaper. I booked an urgent GP appointment at our local hub and he was referred for an endoscopy. That appointment came through within days.

The following day Derek deteriorated even further but still refused to go to A&E or to have an ambulance.

Again, I went to our surgery and spoke to the Practice Manager, who immediately took control as I was in the process of changing surgeries. That morning Derek was examined at our new surgery and they discovered a mass in his groin, and confirmed that the original urine test had come back showing high levels of nitrates. It was also confirmed that according to the original scan for the hernia there were two reacting lymph nodes in his groin, each measuring 8.5mm.

A letter of referral to A&E requesting tests was written and we were immediately put into a taxi to Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich (QEH).

All that day Derek had tests and visits by the various Doctors in QEH and was admitted into ambulatory care. Once on the ward, a Doctor came to inform us that he had Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma which was later confirmed as Stage III as now it had travelled to his lung.

He was also admitted with a fungal infection from mouth to oesophagus, a narrowing of the oesophagus where it meets the stomach, pneumonia, anaemia resulting in blood transfusions and these have been on-going. His raised calcium levels in the blood were now at a critical level.

The following months were very difficult, but we had regular conversations with the medical staff who kept us informed and would answer our questions honestly. From those early moments of him being taken into their care, we felt re-assured and that everything was being done to make certain it would be a positive outcome. We could not have asked for more.

We cannot fault the treatment at QEH. The staff from the front desk, through to the doctors and nurses, have been so caring and Derek has not been denied anything. We are given time to ask all our questions and everything is explained in great detail. What we cannot believe is that their working day is stretched and very demanding and yet we have never seen any of the staff without their smiles. They really make patients feel that they are the only ones that matter. They are quite incredible.

Hopefully our journey might raise awareness to seek help early and always ask questions if you think something isn't right.

Dawn & Derek from Belvedere