

Bad news, good news

There is nothing as wonderful and strange as life. My name is Keith and I live in Wiltshire. This year I reached the ripe old age of 70 and for 66 of those 70 years the fates had been very kind to me. I was blessed with good health, a wonderful wife of 47 years, 2 sons and 5 grandchildren. In early 2016 I realised that I had been having to get up in the night to pee a bit too often. The doctor referred me for blood tests and a biopsy. A few weeks later I was told that I had particularly aggressive prostate cancer. This was a bit of a shock to say the least, but I know that it is not necessarily the death sentence it once was and, being a bit of a technocrat, I have great faith in technology and science. The treatment was to be 23 days of radiotherapy and 3 years of hormone treatment. It was explained that there might be a little unpleasantness whilst being treated but that all would be well in the end.

The experience of hot flushes was not pleasant and the radiotherapy was tiring as it involved a 70-mile round trip each day. I was advised that life should slowly return to relatively normal from Christmas 2016 onwards.

How wrong that was - it was just the beginning. Christmas came, I felt worse and became incontinent of urine. I was referred to an incontinence clinic which did not help and in February 2017 we had to cancel a holiday as I was so ill.

It wasn't until July 2017 that I was finally diagnosed with acute kidney failure and rushed into hospital. The radiotherapy had shrunk my bladder, causing back pressure and damage to my kidneys. What followed was almost constant infections resulting in hospital stays nearly every month. I had to take many different drugs, had 4 stents inserted, a Foley catheter followed by a supra-pubic catheter and several nephrostomies. My body would go into uncontrollable spasms to try and get rid of the stents.

By this time, I had sunk into depression, and if not for my love of my family I would more than likely have given up. I was in a dark place and could not see the point in just existing and having no quality of life. I had lost four stone, hardly had the energy to get out of bed, all food tasted disgusting and it affected what I could drink.

Now the good news. In May 2018, it was decided to remove my bladder and prostate, create a conduit from part of my bowel and introduce me to life with a stoma. I was told that if you get up and move around as soon as you can after the op the sooner you will get home. I was helped with this by being part of a fantastic 'pre-habilitation' programme (Wesfit) where I received counselling and a personal trainer who encouraged me to exercise prior to the op. Only five days after the operation I was at home with the family.

It is now 17 months since my operation, and it is almost as if I was never ill. Admittedly I am minus some bits and have a new friend, my stoma (named Benny). In fact, I write this whilst on holiday in Portugal, and other than having to change the stoma bag every other day, life goes on pretty much as usual and with quality. I would say do not be put off by having a stoma; it is not ideal, but it has given me back a relatively normal life of feeling well and healthy.

It is only natural to be frightened (as I was) that life would forever be changed for the worse by prostate cancer and Pelvic Radiation Disease. I feel fortunate in having a 'happy ending' after a very gruelling time but I know that there are also many others who come through as I have.

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