

**Phil Coverdale’s 25K ‘Trekfest’ to raise awareness of Oesophageal Cancer.**

**My Story**

I was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in November 2012.

I was one of the “lucky” 35% as the cancer was discovered early enough to operate on and get rid of it. For the other 65% it is normally too late for this. A major reason for this is lack of knowledge about oesophageal cancer and what the symptoms are; with your help I hope to do something about this.

The discovery was a complete shock to both me and my wife as we had never heard of such a cancer before and I had never knowingly had anything that remotely resembled a symptom that I needed to see a Doctor about!

As a precaution, I had been taking pills for high cholesterol levels and a raised blood pressure for several years – my Father and paternal Grandfather both having suffered heart problems. I went for a routine Six-monthly check-up at my Doctor’s surgery and, because it was routine I saw one of the Practice Nurses; she said that everything was looking good (blood test result, urine, weight & blood pressure etc.) but would I mind answering a few routine questions whilst I was there? Not a problem I replied confidently.

The first thing she asked was whether I had ever suffered from indigestion & I answered No because to my mind the odd bout of heartburn and indigestion was just a result of overeating and drinking; taking Gaviscon, Rennies or other such antacids usually dealt with the problem and I would never have dreamt that it was something to be discussed with my GP.

But because I was there and the Nurse was asking the questions I was desperate for something – anything – to tell her to make it seem all worthwhile! As it happened, the previous week I had been away on holiday with my wife and she had made a stew for our evening meal; one bit of meat had stuck in my throat but was easily washed down with a sip of tea. This was the first time anything like this had happened. I blamed it on the wife’s cooking (as did she!) and thought nothing more of it until the Nurse asked her questions. For want of something to say I mentioned this to her & she remarked that it was almost certainly nothing to worry about but as the Doctor was there it was probably worth mentioning to him. I went and saw him & recounted the story about the stew; he also remarked that it was almost certainly nothing to worry about but it would be daft not to get it checked out & sent me off for an Endoscopy test – and that’s how I found out about the cancer! If it hadn’t been for the diligence of both the Nurse and my GP I almost certainly wouldn’t be here today!

The rest of the story is a very familiar one to all who have been through it so I won’t dwell on it too much. Suffice it to say that, starting on January 3rd 2013 there was chemotherapy (that entailed a 10-day spell in hospital when I reacted badly to!) followed on 3rd April by undergoing what they call an Ivor-Lewis procedure (it’s easier to say than “a gastro-oesophagectomy”) and a resulting small leak in the joint which meant a slightly longer spell in hospital than normal. Six months later, in December 2013 I had my right kidney removed because of a non-related cancerous growth that had been discovered during all the tests I underwent for my oesophageal cancer. So much for the year 2013!

I have nothing but praise for everyone in the NHS who was involved in my testing and treatment – but in particular for the Upper GI team at The Queen Alexandra hospital – for without them, quite simply, I would not be here now. It sickens me to read in the press and on TV how, in particular, our MP’s like to play political football with the NHS. It must be sickening to work in the NHS and strive desperately every day to make the lives of patients that much better whilst being wrongly portrayed by some as being inefficient and incompetent.

Anyhow, what I would like to concentrate on now is creating awareness of oesophageal cancer and what the symptoms are. Before my shock diagnosis I did not know such a cancer existed or that there were definite symptoms to watch out for & my experience since has shown this to be a widespread problem. If, by creating a greater awareness, just one person’s life is saved then it will be worth it.

I am walking 25km as part of the “TrekFest – The Peaks 2016” in September.

I am doing it for two reasons:

1. As a challenge to myself.
2. To raise money for the production by the OPA of a leaflet/pamphlet that will be designed to help create an awareness of oesophageal cancer and its symptoms.

The intention is to distribute the leaflet widely so that as many people as possible – including Pharmacists, GP’s as well and the general public are encouraged to investigate possible symptoms with the hope that more people can be diagnosed as being at risk at the earliest stage possible and treated accordingly.

Prevention, rather than cure.

So what are the symptoms I hear you ask? Good question. The following is taken from a leaflet produced by the “Be Clear on Cancer” campaign that the NHS ran in 2015 – it is as good a list of symptoms as any:

*What are the symptoms of oesophago-gastric cancers?*

*See your doctor if you’ve had heartburn most days for 3 weeks or more. Even if you’re taking medicine and it seems to help, you still need to see your doctor if you have heartburn for most days. Other symptoms of oesophageal or stomach cancer may include:*

*·         Indigestion on and off for 3 weeks or more*

*·         Food feels like it’s sticking in your throat when you swallow*

*·         Losing weight for no obvious reason*

*·         Trapped wind and frequent burping*

*·         Feeling full very quickly when eating*

*·         Feeling bloated after eating*

*·         Nausea or vomiting*

*·         Pain or discomfort in your upper tummy area*

*You’re not wasting anyone’s time by getting your symptoms checked out, so make that trip to your doctor’s surgery. If it’s nothing to worry about, your mind will be put at rest. But if it is cancer of the oesophagus or stomach, early detection makes it easier to treat. Seeing your doctor without delay may save your life.*

**All I can say is to repeat that last bit - don’t leave it too late. It’s much better to raise a concern & be re-assured that everything is OK than to carry on taking over the counter remedies and thinking – as I did – that it is the norm. It isn’t!**

**If you would like to sponsor me, MyDonate page can be found at the following link:**

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