

The Dreaded C Word

I honestly can say it's the word that I hoped I would never have to say out loud to the people I love the most. I have always thought that saying the word "Cancer" made it somehow come to life. It's almost like the word we never say otherwise the world seems to explode.

Yes, you know that word it begins with a Q.

At the point of being diagnosed I was bombarded with leaflets, books, hospital appointments and people wanting to know what was wrong with me. I remember it being a tough time seeing my older children struggling to find a way to make sense of it all. To say, I was devastated was an understatement. I decided to put pen to paper and write a few tips and hopefully some helpful information to try make your journey a little easier.

I have compiled a list of things I did prior to Surgery and Chemo.

Contact the Federation

Your supervisor can contact the Federation on your behalf. They will be able to find out what you are entitled too, request forms be forwarded to you and offer advise as to what other services are available

Supervision.

Discuss with them how and when you would like to keep in touch, you may not feel up to visitors at times. Discuss who will be you point of contact. Discuss with them what if anything you would like your colleagues to know. Would you want contact from them or not. I found this part extremely difficult and many people don't know what to say.

Before Chemo

Dentist

Attend your dentist explain that you will be having treatment. I was able to obtain a fluoride toothpaste and mouthwash. Prevented mouth infections during Chemo.

Finger Nails and Toe Nails

No false nails, your nails can go black I kept them painted a dark colour which helped visually.

You are Entitled to

Free Prescriptions you can obtain a form from your GP. You may also be entitled to obtain a Blue Badge.

Macmillian

They can provide you with a grant of up to £300.00 to cover costs such as the purchasing of new underwear after treatment, fans, transport. They also offer financial advice and whether you may be entitled to make a claim. I found the service they offered invaluable.

Hair

Sadly, it is likely you will lose your hair not just on your head. I personally had my eyebrows micro bladed and I have to say it was the best thing I could have done. It helped and it again may sound vain but it helped me feel something like the old me I knew. My hair prior to Cancer was long, however I took

control of knowing that at some point I would lose it and decided to have it cut at various lengths in preparation for Chemo.

Wigs/Hats/Scarfs

The hospital I attended provided a voucher to obtain a free wig. I attended WILLS WIGS in BROMSGROVE. Their rooms are private with an appointment system in place. The ladies were very kind and caring and made the experience as pleasant as it can be. I have to say I bought a number of different wigs colours and lengths. Purchase a good quality beanie hat to keep your head warm. You will find your head will get cold. Scarves are a great way to show off your skills, YouTube has some great ideas. The hats are soft and are extremely comfortable varies colours and designs.

Pamper Days

A number of hospitals invite you to attend a pamper day. My hospital was in partnership with No7 who had a number of wonderful ladies who were able to give you advice and tutorials of how to create eyebrows, eyelashes with eye shadows. They provided help with how to apply False Eyelashes, it was a time to speak with ladies who have been through or are experiencing some of the issues you may be.

Packing your bag for surgery.

The usual items for an overnight stay in hospital. Purchase a good quality non wired post-surgical bra. You won't be able to lift your arm/arms up, consider button fronted tops pj's, shirts, cardigans, dressing own pockets are a bonus, socks, change, drain solutions see drain dollies bags, extra long charger as the plugs are never close enough. After surgery, you will need help showering, getting changed. Accept help its ok..

Useful Sites

Jen's friends FREE Mastectomy Pillows. This site via FB provides Free Heart shaped Pillows to anyone having breast surgery. Cost for the postage and package only.

Drain Dollies. Again via FB based in Manchester, they create and sell drainage bags so that if you have drains placed in after surgery you can carry them around. Some Hospitals provide them free of charge.

Charities

There are a number of groups and charities you can access when you feel ready. Wigs for Hero's is a great site. There are a number of charities that will send you gift bags which will have hand creams, tissues, moisturizers, boiled sweets etc.

Hair Growth

Waterman Shampoo and Conditioner. I found the product brilliant in helping my hair grow back.

Treatments

Chemo

Prior to your chemo treatment you will have blood tests to confirm you are able to have treatment. My treatment days were spent with friends and family each having an allocated session. It's a time you can be bossy.. It allowed them to see what was happening, breaking down the myths and barriers they had. Each Chemo session was made into a day to chat, eat and spend quality time together. Take a book, kindle, ipad, treats, warm socks, a blanket and earphones anything that will help the time pass. Keep a record of your symptoms after every chemo that way you will be able to inform the nursing staff who will provide you with the medication to prevent the symptoms commencing.

After Treatment

You will generally feel under the weather and fatigued to start with gradually over the course of the week it will increase. That's the time to rest, limit the amount of contact you have with people outside your home. Your immune system will become dangerously low so try to avoid, eating out, shopping, outings etc. I was advised to drink plenty of water with tap water I was told was the best it will help flush out the treatment.

Radiotherapy

The hospital should provide you with a barrier cream.. If I can give you any advise please use it. It helped cool the reddening, it helped with the itching and keep the area moisturized. After treatment they will discuss with you about not to sit out in direct sunshine and protect the treatment area using a high factor sun cream.

Lymphedema

This is an abnormal swelling that can develop in the arm, breast and torso. It is commonly caused when there is damage or removal of the lymph nodes as part of the treatment of Breast Cancer. I have lymphedema however it can be managed with support garments and treatment.

Counselling

As a member of the Group Insurance I was entitled to receive support via RED ARC. They have dedicated staff trained within the fields of various Cancers and can offer you support. I cannot recommend them enough. I was allocated a nurse Mary Stapleton, who was amazing. She was able to answer the questions I had which I hadn't been able to ask my consultant, helped me with understanding what happened at each step. Red Arc also offer Counselling. I was offered 6 sessions and conducted mine over the telephone as I was in the middle of my chemo. The Police Federation also have a facility that can offer support to your nearest and dearest. Sadly, I found that there was little support out there for the family.

Never think you are a burden because you are not.

Throughout your journey you will get upset, sad and worried, all very normal reactions. You will look into the mirror and see someone you don't really recognise, but its you be proud of what you have achieved. You have walked through something that anyone would dread, you've attended appointment after appointment, allowed nursing staff to lead you through the unknown and you've come out the other side. It is at this time I asked for some alternative therapy. I was provided with Reki, massages, indian head massage. It allows you to rest and relax and helps in your continued road to both physical and mental health. It is a long journey and even after treatment you will need a little time to repair not just physically. You have to remember be kind to yourself.

If I can be of any help or support please feel free to contact me. I do understand how you are feeling and I appreciate how difficult it can be. Happy to help.

Sam Hughes

samantha.hughes@polfed.org

mobile number 07535 177764