



**West Midlands
Police Federation**

Supporting our members in everything we do

The Dreaded C-Word...

Getting help & support



Introduction

When you're given a cancer diagnosis, it can affect you physically, emotionally and financially. It can throw a lot your way and have a huge impact, not only on you but your family and friends too. It's understandable that you might be feeling worried, anxious, and confused. It can be difficult to know where to start.

That's why West Midlands Police Federation has teamed up with one of its workplace representatives - PC Sam Hughes - to produce this booklet. When Sam was diagnosed with breast cancer, she felt overwhelmed with emotion. She struggled with sorting out the 'life admin' that comes with a cancer diagnosis, like work, finances and entitlements as a patient. She wasn't prepared for the life-changing symptoms that happen when you're receiving treatment, like her hair falling out.

Sam says that a tick-box list of tips to help those who have recently been diagnosed with cancer would have made a huge difference. Although it wouldn't have taken away the diagnosis, for her it would've made things easier.

Using her experience, Sam now wants to help others who find themselves or their loved ones in a similar situation.



You are not alone!

A message from West Midlands Police Federation chair, Jon Nott:

We all know or know of somebody who has experienced cancer. It really does affect everyone. Cancer can impact people in different ways, as well as their loved ones.

This booklet has been designed for both men and women, providing valuable information on what to do and prepare for following a cancer diagnosis. Whether you benefit from this booklet yourself, or you know somebody who has been recently diagnosed with cancer, hopefully it can help in some way.

I have nothing but praise for Sam, who has managed to turn such a challenging and difficult experience round, so she can now help others.

Although this booklet won't beat cancer or other illnesses, I hope it will support others in knowing they are not alone."



Sam's story

I can honestly say it's the word that I hoped I would never have to say out loud to the people I love the most: 'cancer'. I always thought that saying the word would somehow make it come to life.

I remember when I was first diagnosed, I felt like I was bombarded with leaflets, books and hospital appointments. It was all so overwhelming.

Family and friends wanted to know what was wrong with me and I was trying to explain it to them. It was extremely tough seeing my older children struggling to find a way to make sense of it all. Alongside all of this, I was trying to come to terms with the diagnosis myself.

To say I was devastated was an understatement. That was my inspiration behind wanting to help others who might find themselves in a similar situation.

I decided to put pen to paper and write out a few tips and hopefully some helpful information to try and make their journey a little easier. We're all in this together.

Sam x



Sam Hughes (second from left) with colleagues ahead of a memorial service.



Sam during treatment.



Sam's colleagues held a collection to treat her to a pair of Louboutin shoes to cheer her up during treatment.

So, you've been given a diagnosis and will most likely need to have either chemotherapy, surgery, or both. At the moment, life might seem quite overwhelming, so here's a checklist, which will hopefully help you during these early stages.



Contact the Federation

If you don't want to, or can't, then you can ask your supervisor to contact the Federation on your behalf.

And, if you are a member of police staff, then contact your union if you are a member.

The Federation, or your union, will be able to find out what you are entitled to, as well as offer any advice as to what other services are available.

It's really important that you discuss as much as you can with them, to make the next few months as easy as possible for you when it comes to work.

Discuss with them how and when you would like to keep in touch (remember, you might not always feel up to visitors). Talk about who will be your point of contact and if there is anything you would like your colleagues to know. Also, it's a good idea to decide whether you want to be contacted by your colleagues or not.

Remember, these types of things should be on your terms. Make sure you are totally happy with the answers.

Find out what you are entitled to

There are several things you might be entitled to, including a blue badge, so speak to your GP and other health professionals about this. You can obtain a 'free prescriptions' form from your GP.

Contact your dentist

Speak to your dentist and explain that you will be having treatment. You might be able to obtain a fluoride toothpaste and mouthwash, which can help prevent infections during chemotherapy.

Contact Macmillan

Get in touch with the cancer support charity, Macmillan. Whether you're looking for extra information on your diagnosis, treatments, or financial advice, the team at Macmillan are there to help with everything and anything.

They will also signpost you towards any local organisations that might be able to support you too. Remember, Macmillan aren't just for patients, they are there for family members, friends and healthcare professionals. I found the service they offered invaluable.

There are other charities that can offer support on diagnosis with other illnesses such as MS, Parkinson's Disease or Motor Neurone Disease.

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

Nails

During chemotherapy, you might find your fingernails go black, so you might want to consider painting them a dark colour, to stop you feeling self-conscious. Unfortunately, it's not a good idea to wear false nails during this time, so stick with your natural tips.

Hair

It's likely that you will lose your hair during chemotherapy and not just the hair on your head. Consider getting beauty treatments, like microblading for your eyebrows, just to help you feel like 'you' still.

If you want to take control of the hair loss, get it cut or shaved yourself, in preparation for chemotherapy.

Wigs, hats and scarves

When it comes to what you wear on your head, everyone is different. Some people prefer wigs, others hats and some, scarves.

Speak to your doctor or the team at the hospital to see if you can obtain a free wig. And, if you can afford to buy more, don't be shy in purchasing more than one. Cancer treatment is never enjoyable, but you can have fun choosing new haircuts and colours; this could be your chance to have whatever style you want.

Even if you don't wear it all of the time, definitely purchase a good quality beanie hat. You'll find your head will get cold, so buy a good hat will keep your head warm.

When it comes to scarves, this is your chance to get a bit adventurous, because they come in so many colours, patterns and designs. There are plenty of video tutorials on YouTube which show you different ways to wear them.

Useful website

'Wigs for Heroes': A charity that supports people who have cancer and experienced hair loss. They offer grants for wigs, as well as pamper packs.

Pamper days

A number of hospitals invite you to attend a pamper day. These can be a great way to meet others in your situation, while being given advice and tutorials on how to do your make up after losing your hair. They include things like creating eyebrows and eyelashes using the make-up you already have. Plus, they teach you how to apply false eyelashes, something that can always be a bit tricky if you're not used to doing it!

Post-surgery bras

If you need breast surgery, then make sure you purchase a good quality non-wired bra. They are super soft and offer comfort when you need it most. These are available in a variety of high-street shops.

Fatigue

Cancer treatment is likely to make you feel more tired, so make sure you listen to your body and get plenty of guilt-free rest when you need it. Speak to your GP or the specialist nurses at Macmillan and they will be able to help you manage your tiredness and make the most of your energy levels.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a drug treatment that uses powerful chemicals to kill fast-growing cancer cells in your body. Prior to chemotherapy, you will have blood tests to confirm you are able to have treatment.

Sam's treatment days were spent with friends and family, each having an allocated session. It allowed them to see what was happening, breaking down any myths surrounding cancer and treatment. It also meant that each chemotherapy session was made into a day to chat, eat and spend quality time together.

Chemo-bag tick-list:

When you are going into hospital for the first time to get chemotherapy treatment, you're going into the unknown. You don't know what to expect, or what to bring and how you feel, which can be really scary.

Ease your anxiety by packing your hospital bag the day before your first treatment session, so you're ready to go.

Here are Sam's top items to pack:

- **A journal.** Chemotherapy days can be long, so take something to write in. Whether it's doctor's notes or how you're feeling, it's good to have something there to document this in. This can be useful to look back on after your treatment, as well as when you need to provide other nursing and healthcare staff with important information.
- **Electronics, like a kindle, or iPad.** You might need entertaining during your treatment sessions, so having a good film at hand can be a real blessing.
- **A device that plays music and headphones.** You might want to listen to your favourite band, or meditation, whichever it is, it can be a great distraction, as well as easing anxiety during treatment.
- **A water bottle.** What you don't know is chemotherapy can be really dehydrating, so drinking lots of water can really help.
- **Nausea relief.** When it comes to nausea, everyone is different and each person's chemotherapy treatment will impact them differently. Alongside medication, try peppermint tea, ginger chews, or dry crackers, if you're starting to feel sick. Remember to try multiple things until you find what suits you.
- **Warm socks and a blanket.** It can get chilly in the hospital, so go prepared.

Post-surgery

You will probably feel under the weather having had chemotherapy, as well as fatigued to start with and gradually over the course of the weeks this will increase. That's the time to rest and 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. Make sure you drink plenty of water to help flush out the treatment.

Types of treatment

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is a treatment where radiation is used to kill cancer cells.

The hospital should provide you with a barrier cream and, if they do, make sure you use it. It will help cool the reddening and can help with itching.

You will probably be advised to not sit outside in direct sunlight or use high factor sun cream immediately after treatment.

Alternative treatment

You might want to explore alternative therapies, like Reiki and massages. These allow you to relax and rest, as your mental and physical health recovers.

Breast surgery

There are different types of surgery for breast cancer, including mastectomy, breast conserving surgery, lymph node removal, and breast reconstruction.

Which treatment you receive will depend on the size of your cancer, where the cancer is, the size of your breasts and your personal wishes.

Surgery bag tick-list

Going into hospital for surgery can be a very emotional time. The best thing you can do is be as prepared as possible, to make sure you're as comfortable as possible. As well as your usual overnight necessities, make sure you pack:

- The good quality **non-wired post-surgical bra** that you purchased!
- **Button-fronted tops, pyjamas, shirts and cardigans.** You won't be able to lift your arm or arms up so take clothes with you that you will be able to get into easily.
- Get yourself a **drainage bag cover.** These have been created to hold post-surgical drains, after you've had surgery. Some hospitals provide these free of charge, however, there are some really fun designs available on the internet and don't be afraid to buy a fun or fashionable one, to keep you smiling.
- **A phone charger.**
- **A dressing gown.**

Useful website

'Jen's Friends': They offer free heart shape mastectomy pillows for anyone having breast surgery. They charge for the cost of postage and package only.

Lymphedema

You might hear this word floating around a lot following your diagnosis. Lymphedema 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 breast cancer treatment.

If you do get diagnosed with lymphedema, there is treatment and support clothing available to help with this.

Extra support

If you are member of the West Midlands Police Federation Group Insurance Scheme, you should be entitled to receive support via Red Arc. They have dedicated staff trained within the fields of various cancers and can offer you support.

Speaking about her support from Red Arc, Sam says: "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 six sessions and conducted mine over the telephone as I was in the middle of my chemo. The Police Federation also has a facility that can offer support to your loved ones."

Whether it's immediately after your diagnosis, following chemotherapy, or after surgery, it's always OK to ask for help.

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 it's 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 a long journey and even after treatment you will need a little time to repair not just physically. You have to remember to be kind to yourself.

Useful links

Macmillan: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

Breast Cancer UK: <http://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk/>

Chemo For Beginners: <https://chemoforbeginners.com/>

Breast Cancer Now: <https://breastcancernow.org>

Prostate Cancer UK: <https://prostatecanceruk.org/>

Orchid Cancer UK (fighting male cancer, together): <https://orchid-cancer.org.uk/>



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