

My journey with prostate cancer began in February 2014 when I went to my GP complaining of a pain in my side. I had had the problem for months but, typical man, I had been putting off going to see a doctor. She said it was probably just a sprain but did a PSA test just in case. Well, the PSA came back positive, over 130!

To be honest, I had been having some of the classic symptoms of prostate problems: getting up in the night, problems "stopping", ... but I assumed that was just advancing age. After all, everyone knows that men get prostate problems they get older and it's nothing to worry about is it?

Most men find the biopsy unpleasant, but not excessively painful. However, when I had my biopsy I found it extremely painful and ended up flat on my back with my lower bowel in spasms and in shock. Fortunately such things are rare. The results were not so good, I had a T3 cancer, with a Gleason score of 4+4, so it was recommended that I have external radiotherapy and hormone treatment.

Up to that point I was coping very well with the news of my cancer, it was an academic exercise: there were articles to be read and statistics to be studied. By coincidence, a Prostate Cancer awareness event was held at my place of work, and so, out of interest, I went along to one of the meetings. There wasn't much said that I didn't already know having read the literature, but somehow it brought it all home to me. Previously my head knew I had cancer, now I knew it in my heart. I found it hard to get through the meeting without a tear in my eye, and afterwards I had a chat with the presenters, some of whom were from the RPCSG. I had the RPCSG leaflet in the pack I had received from the hospital, but had ignored it as "I didn't need support". So that's how I started attending the RPCSG meetings. The main thing I got from the meetings was the feeling that I was not alone in having this disease, and the infectious positive attitude that everyone has. Now I have retired, I also enjoy helping to support the work of the group and in particular promoting Prostate Cancer awareness.

While I was waiting to start my radiotherapy, I found it heart-warming the kindness and support I received, not only from friends and family, but also at work, even from people that I hardly knew. I started hormone treatment and by the time the radiotherapy started in August 2014 a month later, my PSA had dropped to under 16. The radiotherapy was tedious and took up a chunk of every day, but it wasn't uncomfortable (apart from the cold hard slab I had to lay on!). Towards the end I was getting very tired, had bowel problems and difficulty peeing at night. I was also somewhat incontinent, both bowel and urine, nothing serious but when I felt I wanted to go I could not hang around! Taking Tamsulosin greatly helped with passing urine at night, and I have been taking the medication ever since. By the end of my radiotherapy my PSA had dropped further to under 4.

So here I am, a couple of years further on, so how has it been since? After the radiotherapy ceased, my health problems initially got worse, not better, but I expected that – it takes a while for the full effects of the treatment to be felt. During the first year I got steadily better, still a little tired, and getting hot flushes due to the hormone treatment. This last year I have had bowel problems, sometimes constipation and sometimes diarrhoea. I am trying to alleviate this by ensuring I have a high fibre diet; Fibogel helps.

Oh, and that pain in my side? It took months to go but the doctors didn't think it was anything to do with my Prostate Cancer. Sometimes a pain in side can be a good thing!