

My story so far, by Dean Clark

Part 1

So, my name is Dean Clark and I want to share my personal story being diagnosed with cancer.

It all started in Lanzarote April 2023. I went for a bike ride in the mountains with my brother and felt fine during the ride as we climbed to an altitude of 800 metres. On returning to sea level with the ride completed I instantly had a discomfort in my chest and felt light headed. Maybe it was the return to sea level, I thought as I was Ok after about half an hour. But this feeling happened again later in the holiday after just a short walk.

On returning to the UK, I went to my GP as I knew something was wrong. I told him everything, and he then asked if I had any problems eating. I said the only issue being indigestion when eating bread. He said to be on the safe side he would request an endoscopy.

That is when they found the tumour in my oesophagus which was later diagnosed as being cancerous. It was a major shock, and a lot to take in.

I was now on the cancer pathway and appointments were arranged to discuss treatment. I was assigned an Oncologist and after various scans a plan was put in place. I would receive the 'FLOT' system of chemotherapy with 4 rounds or cycles, to shrink the tumour then hopefully an operation to remove it, or what's left, followed by 4 more rounds of chemotherapy afterwards.

I must be honest, not wanting to scare you at the same time, but I found the FLOT system of chemo a very hard time with several side effects. I had extreme fatigue, neuropathy, nausea, diarrhoea, and felt spaced out and very weak. This all sounds bad I know, but I want to be honest about how it affected me. Everyone is different and may not experience these side effects, or feel as half as bad as I did.

That said the Cancer Team are fantastic, and as you progress talk with them so they can adjust the strength of the drugs to minimise the side effects and also tablets for anti-sickness and any other issues.

I was lucky in that the cancer I had was treatable. The first rounds of chemo worked quite well and shrunk the tumour. The operation being the next hurdle to face. After looking at my scans they decided a full Gastrectomy was needed. This took place on January 5th 2024 at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford and was very successful. All the cancer was removed and my histology report was also good, with no residual cancer and only one Lymph node out of 68 removed had signs of cancer, which I knew I had from the scans.

I am now nearly at the end of my Post-Op chemo with 1 round left coming up soon on May 1st. Again, it has been a struggle with many hours of sleeping and resting and overcoming the side effects. Since this all started, I have also lost a lot of weight, currently 26 kg which apparently is also quite common during chemo.

So that is where I am now, and I hope this helps others being preparing for or undergoing chemo. It all sounds daunting I know, but the one thing I have done is to stay as positive as I can, which has not been easy at times, but the support is there for everyone going through cancer, at the hospital and with OOSO. We can and we will beat it.

I aim to add a 'Part 2' to my story towards the end of my first year Post-Op, to share how I got on during recovery. Until then, keep positive and take care of yourself.