

I am one legless, Ian Carruthers. I was brought up in Timperley in Cheshire, but now I live near Bolton Lancashire. I'm here to tell you about my experience linked to Sarcoma cancer. I'll tell you about the lead up to it, how it was dealt with and my experience here. The whole idea of this is to, hopefully, encourage you to share your experiences which will help others.

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I was fortunate enough to take early retirement from teaching in January 2008 but I quickly started having pain in my hip which soon, badly affected my walking. I ended up needing 2 walking sticks by June or July and on August 2nd I walked onto our decking which was wet, both my legs slipped outwards, I grabbed a table but then felt a crack in my hip. It was a '*bit*' painful! Obviously I was taken to the local hospital and the day afterwards I had my hip replaced. I seemed to fairly quickly recover from that and soon was able to walk normally again. The only trouble was that if I went for a long walk I still experienced some pain. I continuously told the specialist in our local hospital, he had it x-rayed but told me that he couldn't see any issues.

I did manage very well. Lois, my absolutely wonderful wife, and I went to Italy in 2009 and walked around and around and around Milan, Verona, Venice and Lake Garda. It was an absolutely wonderful holiday!

I just accepted the pain or soreness when I experienced it but most of the time I was fine. In the following year, 2010, Lois and I decided we wanted to buy a canal narrow boat and to live on it! We just wanted some adventure, to travel through the countryside, historical towns and cities. We finally bought one in August 2011 which was moored on the River Great Ouse near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire. We moved on board in September and in October, after a great deal of work and repairs, on the boat we set off back home. It took a few weeks up lots of different rivers and canals and it was a wonderful, exciting, beautiful, but sometimes a worrying and even a hazardous cruise!

There were odd times, when I was stood up steering the boat, when I started getting a sharp pain in my leg. It didn't worry me, I just exercised my leg presuming it would go away. We arrived back near home on the 2nd of December and moored up at a local marina but remained living on board. I noticed that I had lost quite a lot of weight but believed it to be a positive thing, having been much more physical during our cruise.

Shortly afterwards I found a swelling on my hip, I started to get very sharp pains in my leg whilst I sat down, I looked grey, lost more weight, my sister-in-law told Lois that she thought I looked cancerous, so I decided to go and see the GP in February 2012.

I told him that I had a swelling which had started to get very warm, I had very sharp pains and that I had lost a lot of weight. He sent me for an x-ray, which showed nothing, he didn't look at the swelling, said there would be nothing to worry about and sent me to see a physiotherapist.

I pushed away any thought of cancer even though I still had the pains. The swelling, swelled and it became much hotter. 2012 was a terrible summer, it rained continuously but we were determined to go for a cruise up the Leeds Liverpool Canal to Skipton in Yorkshire. I must admit, I wasn't keen, didn't want to be bothered about anything but we set off. During the cruise I lost my usually very strong appetite, felt dizzy, had no energy and just felt generally defective. I still dismissed much thought about cancer - I think you have to don't you? I had to presume the GP was right and the growing swelling just showed infection.

We didn't make it to Skipton, we reached Barnoldswick, which isn't far away from Skipton but I'd had enough. Fortunately, Lois agreed with me to return back to the marina. Lois persuaded me to return and to see a GP. I saw a locum doctor who clearly showed concern about my general condition. She also considered that my swelling was an infection but blood tests showed that I was anaemic and she decided to send me to the local hospital's orthopaedic section and also for general tests for cancer. Obviously very worrying! We left the narrow boat, at that point I was so desperate just to go back home!

The orthopaedic consultant told me that I needed my hip replacement taken out, all the infection removed, a temporary replacement inserted and once the infection had disappeared then a new hip replacement would be re-fitted. That came across as positive but then during the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013 I underwent all the cancer tests; chest x-ray, urine check, gastroscopy and colonoscopy. My feelings were on a rollercoaster! There were times when I felt so very depressed and thought that cancer was there. My mother and father, aunts, uncles and friends had all died from cancer and although I kept hearing/reading that these days more and more people with cancer had it removed, but it couldn't make any positive difference to me.

However, all the cancer tests showed that it wasn't there so that helped me and I just looked forward to having my hip replacement operations. The first operation, planned for October 2012, was cancelled because some theatre equipment had broken. I went for a pre-operation assessment in November and the anaesthetist there told me that the newly planned operation for December would also be cancelled because I was very anaemic. That pushed me straight back down again. The GP put me on folic acid tablets and the next possible operation was planned for March 2013.

I turned up for the operation. I had some blood transfusion to help with my anaemia and the day afterwards I went down for the operation. I was outside the theatre being prepared for the hip replacement and the consultant came to see me. He looked shocked when he looked at me and told me straight away that he was going to cancel the operation and was going to send me for an MRI scan later that day. I had to try to block off the massive concern that had arrived. I had the scan and not long after the consultant came to the ward and took me and Lois into a side room.

We were both in fear, just knowing what he was going to tell us. We were told that from the scan he could see a tumour in my hip. He told me that it could be removed possibly by radiotherapy, chemotherapy but more likely amputation. He told me that he would refer me to another hospital. Shock, terror, sickness, tears, anxiety for Lois and my family, a real fear of dying!

I was referred to The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry, Shropshire. My early first appointment, again in March 2013, I met up with Consultant Gill Cribb, Macmillan Sisters Jane Evans and Caroline Pemberton who, at the time, I didn't realise that I would end up loving all three of them to bits!! Gill had seen the results of the MRI scan I had at Bolton and she thought that it may not be cancer but wanted me to undergo a biopsy to ensure that. Because I thought I would escape it, I felt just so positive and we went to MacDonald's on the way home to celebrate and I managed to jump up and even click my heels together! Ouch!

I went back to Oswestry overnight on the 1st April (April Fool's Day!?) for my biopsy and it was probably necessary for me to still feel very optimistic when I went home. MacDonald's! I returned about a week later. Caroline and Gill came into the room where myself, Lois and my eldest son Peter were. Gill then told me that unfortunately, it *was* cancer..... Caroline and Gill held my hands and obviously, although it was yet another shock I just didn't understand how to take it in. I was also told that the best way to remove the Sarcoma Cancer would be to amputate my leg. I can't understand why really, but I somehow had no fear of losing my leg. We had planned to celebrate yet again at MacDonald's but we drove straight past.

I had more scans and Gill referred me to the Christie Hospital in Manchester as she was concerned that my lymph node in my abdomen had swollen and she was anxious that the cancer may have spread. I had a biopsy and very fortunately the cancer was not there. However, around this time I was starting to not feel well at all. The anaemia was worse, I had no appetite, felt sickly, depressed and very weak. I looked gaunt and was expecting that I was likely to pass away. I had even started to plan my funeral!

I went to The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital for my amputation in June. I was admitted to the Ludlow Ward. I had to undergo much blood transfusion because of the anaemia. During my pre-operation assessment I was told that my heart and lungs made me seem that I was 10 years younger, which made me feel affirmed but

Gill came to talk to me before the operation and told me that because the operation was so serious it could be fatal. I realise now that I *had* to be told that but yes, obviously, it did scare me! Two days prior to the amputation I panicked!! Lois and the staff, especially Sister Helen, in the Ludlow Ward tried to calm me and tell me that I *would* survive. The day after, the day before the 'op', I think I just accepted it all. I remember going for a shower and by then my leg hurt so much and looked so badly swollen that I thought I would just be glad to get rid of it!

On the 18th of June 2013 I had my operation from Gill and Paul Cool. All I remember was going into the preparation room and then waking up in the High Dependency Unit (HDU) and I felt *ok!* It was ok for me, but the operation took 8 hours and my wife, Lois, had to just sit and wait! I was in HDU for a couple of days and although the staff there were excellent, I remember feeling desperate to get back to the Ludlow Ward.

I have to say that *all* the staff on Ludlow Ward were absolutely wonderful with me. They showed just so much genuine, care, empathy, compassion etc. etc. They made me feel special. Sister Helen was exceptional. She is quite certain about things, which is necessary of course, but she is a great person for whom I have total respect and I adore her too! I have to always go to Ludlow Ward when I go to Oswestry for check-ups and anything else. In fact I love that hospital! I enjoy going there and seeing all the people who have cared for me - *all* of them! Of course Lois, who is a retired nurse, was, and still is also totally wonderful with me. Well, most of the time! Jane Evans and Caroline Pemberton even found a place for her to stay while I was having my operation and care so she was able to be with me nearly every day. Also my friends and especially my family were marvellous with me too.

Like many of us patients (I presume), a few days after the operation I had to have the epidural anaesthesia line removed and I was warned that it would cause pain. It did! But then they gave me a dosage of morphine to stop the pain. The trouble is with that is that it sends me

totally doo lally, lally!! That was only for a few days (which I don't remember!) and then Gill came to see me again.

She told me that they had checked two lymph glands on either side of the removed sarcoma tumour,.....and they were *clear!* How can I describe my response to that!? Dying.....//.....living on! Ever since that moment I have looked at my life as so differently new and totally vital! Thank you so much Gill for that!

My health improved and improved. I started to be assisted by the physiotherapist, using a zimmer and then it was the time to go home and to be back with my immediate family and our dogs. Wonderful!! I was helped well by the district nurses, the local physios and I have to admit that the Bolton Social Services were great. They built a ramp to enable me to get out of the back door and down to the back and front gardens, also provided a wet room, a chair lift, an accessible front porch and widened the kitchen door so I could get in there in my wheelchair. And also, thanks to Maria who works do Irwin Mitchell, I may now even get a downstairs loo! That will be very helpful!

Also I became so determined to find all ways of still being an effective individual and that certainly still exists. OK I can't climb up things like ladders etc. but I have to accept things like that. Soon I may get my third prosthetic leg and hopefully this one will be very acceptable, and so then I will be able to learn to walk again. I also had the vast majority of my hip removed and so it's difficult to fit me with a prosthetic leg. I want to be able to take my dogs out and even to try to walk up a local hill. It may be difficult but I want that challenge! There are times of pain in my phantom leg which I am sure all of you, similar to me, experience. There is sometimes frustration that I am unable to achieve certain things, a lack of disabled access which obviously I hadn't seen before and when people who aren't disabled, park in disabled car spaces.....!!! And also as a result of a major operation I can't remember certain words; some nouns, verbs adverbs, adjectives and particularly names.

But I really do totally appreciate each and every day. It is now not far off 3 years since my amputation and I feel confident that there will be a good few years more to come.