

# Cancer Connect

The St George's newsletter for people affected by cancer

Issue 9, February 2023

## Rocking my baldness

Sharon-Ann Phillips

Today, I am 'rocking my baldness'. Who would have thought that two years ago, I would be devastated by a baldness, which I now embrace?



**A breast cancer diagnosis in lockdown 2020 was the last thing I ever dreamt I would face, especially after the prognosis of 'six months to live' from myeloma and amyloidosis five years before. Yet here I was, immunocompromised, avoiding Covid, only to be given an emergency lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy to treat an unconnected breast cancer.**

The dreaded chemotherapy created a barrage of side effects: One morning, I woke up to see clumps of hair on my pillow. I was horrified and realised that both sides of my hair had fallen out. Grabbing my husband's shears, with tear-filled eyes and trembling hands shaved my hair off. I looked at my bald head and burst into tears. I was devastated; I thought I would never get over it.

After ordering my wig from St. Georges, I realised I had the best of both worlds. I could wear a wig or go bald, 'rocking my baldness', as I lovingly address it. I am alive and giving thanks: reaping numerous benefits, like swimming where hair is no longer a problem.

Now when I take my wig off whilst visiting friends, I am so comfortable with my baldness that I often forget and leave it behind.

Whatever your challenges, do not give up. Give thanks. Tomorrow brings a new perspective.

Today, 'hair loss'. Tomorrow, 'rocking my baldness'.

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For patients, families and carers

**Wig Service at St Georges:** Contact Cecilia Correa on  
Tel: 020 8487 6033 or the Macmillan Information & Support Centre  
Email: [cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk)



# Brave Balham boy beats cancer on his birthday



**On Wednesday 21 July, young cancer patient Patrick McCarthy celebrated his tenth birthday by ringing the end of treatment bell.**

Patrick was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia in January 2019 and spent three years undergoing treatment from specialist teams at St George's.

Patrick's mum said: "We're overjoyed that Patrick is cancer free, it's been a very special birthday to remember."

Ringling the bell is a special moment to celebrate. Patrick's father Gerard McCarthy said: "I can't put into words how fantastic the St George's Hospital paediatric staff have been in supporting us."

"Patrick has been through a tough time, but all the hospital staff have gone above and beyond to help make Patrick's experience at hospital very memorable."

"Patrick really enjoyed his lessons at the hospital school, and the community nursing team were fantastic throughout the COVID-19 lockdown and made the transition from hospital treatment to recovery at home a lot easier for us. We are so grateful to Pinckney Ward and are forever indebted to their care."

Naomi Oldreive, Paediatric Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist, said: "Ringing the bell is a momentous occasion for young patients. It's a chance to celebrate finishing treatment, and to recognise how far they've come."

Patrick's brave story attracted attention from a South West London Press reader, who is leaving him 5K in his will, after reading about his cancer journey. The family were over the moon for receiving this generous gift.

**We wish Patrick the best of luck for a bright happy future**

## Ringling sounds of hope

**In November, St George's unveiled a new Milestone Bell, donated by UK Charity 'End of Treatment Bells' to celebrate our patients and their treatment journey at St Georges.**

The Milestone Bell is for all patients to celebrate special moments at hospital, to recognise end of treatment cycles, and thank clinical teams looking after them. It's a symbol of positivity and strength, giving patients and their families an opportunity to reflect on their experience at hospital.

Sue Fox Co-Chair of Voice, St George's Cancer Patient Support Group, said: "We all have good and bad days, but sometimes good days really lift us up. It's lovely to celebrate these milestones by ringing the bell. It might be rung for ending treatment, a scan that was better than the last one, or a blood test that shows a better result."



**Thanks to all involved in installing the bell in the Walk on the Wild Side Garden, Lanesborough wing.**

# My Health Journey 1964-2022

Hi, I'm Jenny a 58-year-old Yorkshire born, mother of two grownups, who has a diagnosis of Common Variable Immunodeficiency, Bronchiectasis and more recently Squamous Cell Carcinoma leading to Gynae cancer treatment.

I have lived with health uncertainty all my life and I am never sure what health concerns sit around the corner. I have often written down my thoughts and experiences in little vignettes. I have become emotionally strong, worked hard on my understanding and responses to difficult situations and over time I have learnt to appreciate today, continue to plan for the future (even though the plans don't always work out), enjoy what I have and cherish my family and friends.

To read more about my journey, visit the Macmillan Cancer Information & Support Centre webpage here

<https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/My-Health-Journey-Jenny-Wainman-Cancer-Connect-Feb-2023.pdf>



## Official opening of our new MRI Unit

**These new MRI facilities provide a much better experience for staff and patients. They provide vital extra diagnostic capacity, so staff can see more than 100 extra patients every week. This reduces waiting lists for patients and offers a full range of imaging tests which is great news for our patients.**

St George's Hospital Charity provided a range of professional art pieces to bring some colour and life to the new unit. The framed artworks on display were selected by staff working in the new facility, from a longlist of artists curated by the arts team.

Amerjit Chohan, Chief Executive of St George's Hospital Charity said:

"This new MRI building will provide the community and patients with state-of-the-art technology, ensuring that St George's continues to be one of the leading healthcare institutions in the UK. We are proud to provide artwork for this new facility, making it a patient friendly environment."

**Thank you and well done to everyone who has been involved in the project!**



# Voice - *Future Voice Plans*

*Voice is looking forward to a busy year supporting Cancer Services with new projects*

## RESOURCES

### Macmillan Cancer Information & Support Centre

Ground Floor, Grosvenor Wing,  
St George's Hospital

Tel: 020 8725 2677

#### Email:

[cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

Open: Mon - Thurs 8.30am - 5.30pm,  
Fri 9am - 4.30pm

Closed Bank Holidays

### Macmillan Information & Support Centre - St George's

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Help Line: 0808 808 00 00

Mon - Sun, 8am - 8pm

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

### Other advice services:

#### Citizens Advice

Tel: 03444 111 444

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

#### Turn2us (financial support)

[www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

#### Step Change (debt advice)

Tel: 0800 138 1111

[www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)

#### Age UK

Tel: 0800 055 6112

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

#### Law Centres Network

(free legal advice)

Tel: 020 3637 1330

[www.lawcentres.org.uk](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk)

#### ACAS (Advice on workplace rights)

Helpline: 0300 123 1100

[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**VOICE is the cancer patients/carers user group. We work with the hospital's Cancer Division to improve services.**

There are over 40 new initiatives to develop improved cancer services which are grouped under five main headings:

- Macmillan Centre refurbishment and repurposing project
- New Macmillan Centre hub in Queen Mary's Hospital
- Improving the response rate of the National Cancer Patient Survey to better reflect the diversity of Cancer patients
- Pelvic health projects under the "Living with and Beyond Cancer" Program
- Developing sessions where new cancer patients receive either a video or attend a session to learn about the clinical and practical essentials to support their care.

All projects need input from patients. Watch out for invitations to participate. If you are not a member, please join VOICE to keep informed of new services.

<https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/service/cancer-services/cancer-support/voice/>



**The Cancer Connect editorial team would love to hear your comments about our newsletter**

If you would like to make a comment, want more information about any article or have a suggestion for a future article, please email the Macmillan Information & Support Centre Manager at [cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

You can also visit the centre on the ground floor of Grosvenor Wing, St George's Hospital.

**St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust,  
Blackshaw Road, Tooting, London SW17 0QT  
Tel 020 8672 1255 [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

  
St George's University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust



Voice  
the voice of people  
at St George's  
affected by cancer

In partnership with  
**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT