

Cancer Connect

The St George's University Hospital newsletter for people affected by cancer.
Blood Cancer Awareness Month Special.

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Paul's Story



My cancer story started with a toothache. I was fit and healthy, in my early 30s and had just returned from a fun week skiing. I started feeling pain in one of my teeth and after a day or so went to see the dentist. The dentist gave me some antibiotics which didn't work and so sent me to my GP. My GP did a blood test and within 4 hours I was asked to go straight to St George's Hospital.

From the moment I arrived I found all the staff, the doctors, the nurses and the healthcare assistants 'kind and helpful. I was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia, and my treatment started the next morning. My initial reaction to being told I had cancer feels very British, in that I asked to go home and have a cup of tea before I got going. Sadly, the nature of my cancer meant I couldn't leave the ward, so my first cup of tea was a hospital one. The tea and coffee were always very good and on the other hand the food (in all honesty) was a little more variable.

I spent the best part of 9 months in isolation having chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. It was, at times, extremely tough but I always felt supported and cared for. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my treatment and my care during and after my leukaemia. I now attend annual check-ups and while they aren't a highly of my year to look forward to... it still fills me with admiration seeing everyone there forging their way through their treatment, or there to help others forging their way through.

When I was ill stories of other people going through cancer (or living a life after cancer) were gold dust to me. I hope I can pass that on by sharing a little of mine. I also learned that everyone has their own way to cope through the journey – there is no right way. Which means if you haven't found your way of coping yet don't give up.



Gordon's Story

I'm Gordon and I live near St George's Hospital here in Tooting. In February 2024 I was diagnosed with High Grade (no half measures here!) Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma at the base of my back. Prior to that I had been successfully treated for both Hodgkin's Lymphoma and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma about 15 years ago. I don't recall how I felt on diagnosis other than I knew I was in good hands and simply assumed all would be well. My wife [Sandra] was a comforting, solid, rock and provided all the necessary love, support and advice I needed.

My most recent treatment consisted of several sessions of preliminary chemotherapy, followed by CAR-T cell therapy, in early September 2024. Before that I received a great deal of useful preparatory advice and information as well as attending a helpful and informative seminar. I can't remember the details of the seminar, but it was a friendly and relaxed session, and any questions were answered fully. It certainly helped me prepare for the treatment, but the aftereffects were far worse and uncomfortable than I imagined. The CAR-T treatment itself was quick and painless, and I remained in hospital for 5 weeks afterwards. The aftereffects (all of which I had been made aware of) however were profound, often unpleasant and prolonged. They included a lack of mobility (necessitating

the use of a walking stick for several weeks), loss of balance, dizziness and sleeplessness to name a few. Although some of these symptoms (in very much reduced forms) persist today I am now almost back to normal and get out and about much as I used to. As I write this, we are experiencing our second (or is it third?!) [heatwave] of the summer so my galivanting has been put on hold as I wilt in the heat.

At all times I had superb professional care and attention from numerous consultants, clinicians, hardworking nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists, the Xray team, clinic co-ordinators, therapists, scanning technicians, porters, the invaluable cleaners, auxiliary staff and all the many, many others I don't know or never even met. This excellent, kind, reliable, comforting and knowledgeable care and attention continues today and has been crucial in helping me on the road to recovery. Two years on I can't remember individual names but I'm still in the hospital quite often (sadly with other ailments) and recognise many familiar, friendly, faces. In addition, I received, and continue to receive, a

great deal of very useful background information from the Macmillan nursing staff (past and present) always. Their friendly and welcoming office (see image below) is always a wonderful, calm, place to pause for a chat, or a coffee, or simply for some soothing peace and quiet.

I should add that the invaluable help and support of my wonderful wife, Sandra, has been a huge benefit, in so many ways, during the past few years.

I take this opportunity to say a big thank you to the wonderful, dependable, NHS and, once again, thank everyone who has helped, and continues to help, me during the last 18 months; it is all very, very much appreciated.
- Gordon

BLOOD CANCER AWARENESS EVENT

18th
SEPTEMBER

09:30-12:00

OUTSIDE M&S
GROSVENOR
WING
GROUND FLOOR



CAR-T THERAPY

CAR-T is a cellular therapy that is less than a decade old and has been a treatment pathway at St. George's for 2 years. CAR-T stands for Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell Therapy and it is a process by which the T cells (part of your immune system) from a patient are genetically modified and engineered to specifically target their cancer with the aim of inducing a long remission.

It is currently licensed for several forms of lymphoma and B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (B-ALL) after previous treatment has been given and either the patient has not responded to their therapy, or they have relapsed within a year. We use a few different 'products' in CAR-T and it is a treatment pathway that is continually developing and will eventually add more products for different conditions once approved by the NHS.

My role as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in this area is to coordinate the patient treatment plan from start to finish. Apart from facilitating appointments and coordinating services, my role has included helping set up the service, rolling out teaching to the nurses and medical staff who are involved in administering the therapy and talking to the patients and their loved ones throughout this exciting treatment.

Our first infusion was given 2 years on the Ruth Myles Ward and we have since given many more.

Many people and different teams have been involved in bringing and maintaining this service at St. George's; the haematology

team, doctors and pharmacists who have set up the service, the apheresis team and many others across the Trust, including the cardiac, respiratory and radiology teams. Nurses from the ward and day units are fundamental to our success as is the joint cooperating of everyone working together.

I am proud to be part of an evolving and dynamic service and I look forward to what the future brings and the benefits it will bring to our patients at St. George's Hospital.

Hannah Thorpe

CAR-T Clinical Nurse Specialist



What is CENTRE?

The Cancer Experience Network - To Represent Everyone (CENTRE) is an engagement forum for cancer patients, carers, loved ones, representatives of local community cancer support groups to have your say about cancer care. We believe that patient voices should be at the centre of cancer care.

What would being Member of CENTRE involve?

At the heart of being a member of CENTRE is contributing within your own wants and limits. Whether that be attending events, helping to co-design projects in Cancer Services, or simply filling out anonymous surveys. Your voice matters, and the Cancer Services teams want to hear it.

Launch Event

CENTRE launches on
14th October 2026,
15:00-18:00

Location: Hyde Park Room,
St George's Hospital,
or on Microsoft Teams.

Scan the QR code to
register your interest:



Volunteering

My name is Martin, I've been volunteering for Macmillan Cancer Support for eight years. I am now volunteering at the Macmillan Information and Support Centre at St George's providing emotional support to patients their families and friends, suggesting helpful Macmillan information booklets, signposting to appropriate support groups and services or just offering a listening ear and a cuppa.



Volunteering for Macmillan Cancer Support has given me a strong sense of purpose, like so many I have been touched by cancer, family members including both my parents had cancer and I am currently supporting several close friends undergoing treatment or living with cancer.

Why I volunteer:

- To show support for people whose lives are affected by cancer
- To gain new skills and experiences
- Share skills and experience developed over 15 years working in two specialist cancer hospitals (non-clinical roles)
- To meet and work with likeminded people who share a passion for helping others and build friendships with other volunteers

There are several flexible volunteering roles available within the Trust, if you are interested in finding out more please contact voluntary.services@stgeorges.nhs.uk

Resources

Macmillan cancer information and support centre
St. George's Hospital Tooting
Ground floor, Grosvenor wing,
Tel: 0208-725-2677

Macmillan Cancer support
Help line: 0808-808-0000
Mon-sun, 8am-8pm

Macmillan community cancer link
worker Support services
Tel: 0300-1000-200
Macmillian.org.uk

Other advice services

Macmillan Money & More
Tel: 0800 808 5871
debtfreeadvice.com/macmillan

Anthony Nolan
anthonymolan.org

Cancer care Map
cancercaremap.org

Maggie's
Tel: 0300 1231 801
maggies.org

Blood Cancer UK
Tel: 01618215657
bloodcancer.org.uk

ACAS (Advise on workplace rights)
Helpline: 0300- 123-1100
acas.org.uk

Age UK
Tel: 0800-055-6112
ageuk.org.uk

If you would like to be a part of the next issue contact:
cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk