

INSPIRATION

How I beat cancer against the odds

■ **Question:** Why has one woman's survival of pancreatic cancer driven her to help others facing the disease?

■ **Answer:** For Ali Stunt, her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer came out of nowhere — and it was one that she nearly didn't survive.

HOW I MADE IT

Ali Stunt should be dead by now — according to statistics. Stunt, from Surrey, married with two children, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of 41 in 2007 — and is one of the fortunate few with pancreatic cancer to receive a diagnosis in time to save their life. In her case, this came after a circuitous journey via several doctors.

“Pancreatic cancer is the fifth commonest cause of cancer death and the 5-year survival rate is only 3 per cent: most pancreatic cancer patients are diagnosed too late,” she explains.

Unexplained weight loss, along with abdominal and/or back pain and jaundice are three of the most commonly recognised symptoms of pancreatic cancer: sadly they can be indicative of late-stage disease, says Stunt: “It is important therefore to identify some early symptoms, or clusters of symptoms.”

Life and death

There is an extensive degree of misdiagnosis, Stunt explains: partly due to the lack of awareness about symptoms, both among medical communities and the general public. In addition, early symptoms are often vague. These delays can mean the difference between life and death: being diagnosed in time for surgery or not.

“I was lucky enough to be operated on the week after the initial tests and my story highlights one of the few positives of pancreatic cancer — the fact that if patients are diagnosed in time for surgery, their chances of surviving 5 years increases ten-fold.

This is a crucial message to communicate to show there is something that can be done.”

Towards this end Stunt set up Pancreatic Cancer Action, a national charity committed to improving survival rates for this grim disease through greater awareness of symptoms amongst both consumers and the medical profession, information and increased funding.

To help earlier diagnosis amongst the medical community Pancreatic Cancer Action is about to launch an E-learning module for GPs developed in association with the Royal College of GPs. It is the first of its kind for pancreatic cancer and offers some sort of practical solution to the problem of late diagnosis.

Improving statistics

“The 5-year survival statistics for pancreatic cancer have not improved in over 40 years: I want to change that by having more people diagnosed in time for surgery — currently the only potential for a cure. One of the ways to do this is to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms.

“August is the 5-year anniversary of my diagnosis. I am one of the lucky 3 per cent who survive: it is my passion that in the future many more will have the outcome that I have had.”

EMILY DAVIES

info.uk@mediaplanet.com

