

Rhianne's Story

In August 2018 I noticed a painful ulcer on the side of my tongue. After getting it checked, I was initially told it was due to my tongue scraping against my teeth. However, this didn't heal. After a long waited hospital referral and several appointments later, I was finally given a biopsy.

“ I was diagnosed in February with Stage 2 Oral Cancer at 20 years old. ”

At such a young age I struggled to even say the words 'I have cancer'. I also had four months left of my psychology degree and couldn't focus on anything other than how I was going to complete this.

My parents got me private treatment quickly and as the cancer was aggressive, progressing to stage 3 and on the way to my blood cells, I'm not sure I'd be sitting here writing this if wasn't for them. They took a lot of the weight off, dealing with the letters and appointments, I just showed up. But seeing your parents go through it also, and see how much time they had to take off work, how much they were spending to keep me alive is one of the stresses as a young person I went through.

In March I had my surgery. A hemiglossectomy with tongue reconstruction and a lymph neck dissection. Even though It was all explained what

they were going to do to me, none of us were quite prepared for the effects of treatment. After a 14 hour long surgery, I was put into ICU and woke up a day later. 3 blurred days slowly went by and I was allowed to go up to the ward, making me feel a little human again. My expected stay was 2 weeks, but I wanted to get out as soon as I possibly could and challenged the doctor's views. I sped up my healing with exercises every day and practiced positive thinking. This got me out of the hospital in just over a week.



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Head & Neck Cancer Support Group
Registered Charity Number : 1149794

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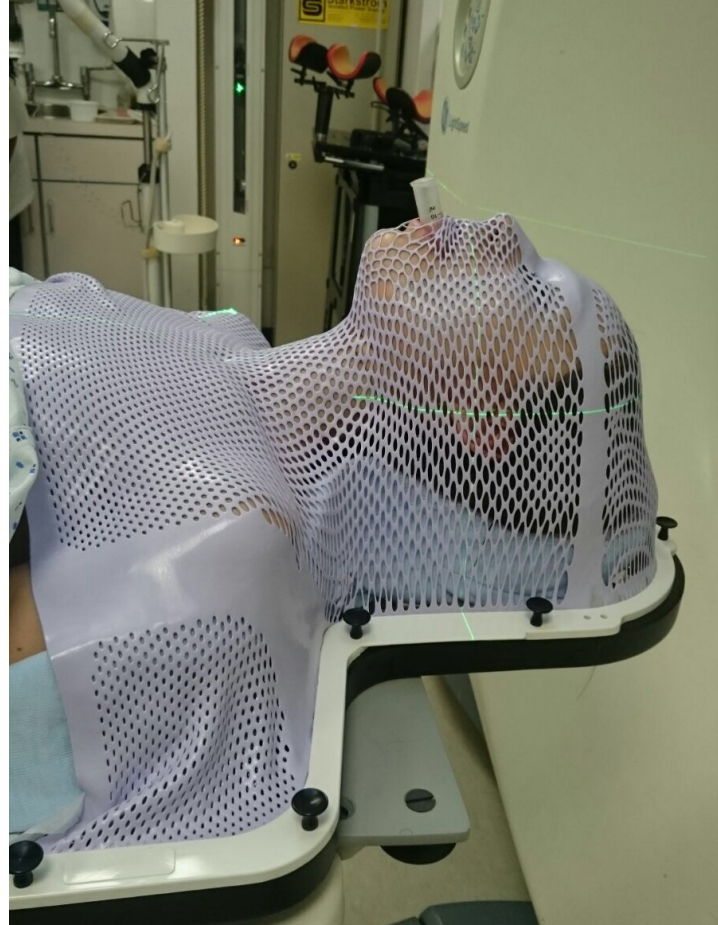
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After 6 weeks of recovery at home, I went for my PEG feeding tube placement procedure. My mask was made and I was ready for round 2 of treatment, radiotherapy. After about 2 weeks the symptoms hit me like a ton of bricks. Ulcers filled my mouth whilst my neck was burnt and bleeding. I had another 3 months of pain with no ability to eat or at times speak. But every day was getting better, my 21st birthday came round in July and I went out for my first proper meal.

“At times I would scroll through social media and be angry that I couldn’t do any of the things people my age were doing...”

Being a young female the effect cancer had on my appearance was a main worry. I remember dressing the best I could throughout treatment until I had to give in to tracksuit bottoms and scruffy hair. I embraced my scars and never let that worry me, I felt unique and they were my “tattoos”.

I felt less confident with the swelling on my neck and face and how my tongue looked, but it’s something you realise people don’t really notice as much as you do. But the one good thing about being young with a cancer diagnosis is the drive. I had so much motivation and drive to get better and do exactly as the doctors advised that I exceeded recovery expectations. This drive also pushed me to graduate with my goal of a first, when told I wouldn’t be able to graduate in the first place.



I’m now ready to utilise my speedy recovery to support others; whether it’s tips on what to eat during treatment, maintaining oral hygiene with the least amount of pain and remaining positive. Being a young female that had oral cancer was difficult, but with positive thinking and a great support system I’m feeling myself again.

I can’t thank my family enough for all their support. My Mum and Dad; Maria and Tony Hollis who visited me in hospital and drove me to my treatment every day. Without them I might not be writing this. My sisters; Abbie and Alayna for the constant support and making me feel “normal”, and my boyfriend Jack Cox for visiting me every single day in hospital.

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