

Audrey's Story

“In October 2018 I went to see my hygienist for a routine 3 monthly appointment. However, this appointment was different...”

Over the years I have got to know my dentist and hygienist very well. This appointment was different – she asked me to go through to the dentist as she could see something on the roof of my mouth that didn't look right. The dentist took photographs and submitted an urgent hospital referral. I left the dental practice knowing that this was not sounding good.

Just over a week later I had my first appointment at the hospital and I met with a doctor there who confirmed that there was a “lesion” that would require further investigation. It was a blur from there onwards and I was quickly on a rollercoaster ride of biopsies, photographs, blood tests and various scans including an MRI which I found particularly difficult – it was so noisy and claustrophobic!

I received a phone call from the hospital a couple of weeks after the initial tests asking if I could attend an appointment with one of the surgeons at Royal Preston Hospital the following day. I took my daughter with me and we waited with baited breath. It was at this appointment that I was first told I had cancer. It was mentioned in a very casual manner as if it was of very little significance – I was stunned although not surprised. The cancer was at an early stage with no evidence of spread but due to its location on my soft palate surgery was not a viable option.

The surgeon said that he had wanted to meet me quickly to assess if I would be suitable for radiotherapy as that would be the treatment path offered to me. I initially thought that this was a good option as my sister had a course of radiotherapy as part of her breast cancer treatment 14 years ago and she found it relatively easy.

My daughter asked if the treatment was palliative or curative and we were told that the aim was most



Continued >



The Swallows

Head & Neck Cancer Support Group
Registered Charity Number: 1149794

To read more patient stories or find out more about Head & Neck Cancer support visit:
www.theswallows.org.uk



theswallowscancersupport



@swallowsgroup

JustGiving

definitely a curative one. I then awaited an oncologist appointment and I was terrified but felt that the news was far more positive than it could have been.

“My daughter went away and did some research and quickly showed concerns around the treatment plan that I was facing. I still couldn’t understand her worries and failed to fully understand the long lasting side effects that I was facing and the tough course of treatment that was ahead.”

We finally met with the oncologist in mid-November. My daughter broke down during the consultation and said that she could not bear to watch me go through the course of prescribed radiotherapy. She asked if there were any other alternatives available and that was the first time that we heard the words “robotic surgery”. The oncologist spoke of a surgeon in Blackburn who was operating on some head and neck cancer patients using a robot but stressed that it was only viable for some patients and there was no guarantee that she would be able to help. He offered a referral and we accepted.

I first met Miss Ghazali at Royal Blackburn hospital in mid-December 2018. She looked at my tumour and said she could help! I agreed to the surgery and was booked in for the 3rd of January 2019. She listened to our concerns and we spoke about the side effects of radiotherapy and if there was a chance that the robotic surgery would take away the need for this course of action. No promises were made but the aim of the surgery was to eradicate the cancer without the need for further treatment. We went away and made the best of our Christmas and New Year despite the apprehension around the impending surgery that I was facing. The only other surgery I had been subjected to was a caesarean section 40 years earlier!!



dissection. I was in surgery for 5 hours but amazingly I was drinking fluids and eating sloppy foods the next day – I couldn’t believe it! A nasal feeding tube was kept in place for a couple of days to make sure that I could eat sufficiently but this was removed quickly and I left the hospital after only 4 days with just paracetamol and ibuprofen for pain relief. My diet was back to normal within a fortnight.

I am now six months post surgery and I am currently “free of disease” without any further treatment. I eat and drink normally with the only lasting effect being a numb patch on my neck at the surgical site of the neck dissection. This continues to improve on a monthly basis and I still cannot quite believe how lucky I have been to meet Miss Ghazali and her amazing robot!

Audrey



I underwent the surgery to remove the cancer along with a neck

The Swallows

Head & Neck Cancer Support Group
Registered Charity Number: 1149794

To read more patient stories or find out more about Head & Neck Cancer support visit:
www.theswallows.org.uk



theswallowscancersupport



@swallowsgroup

JustGiving