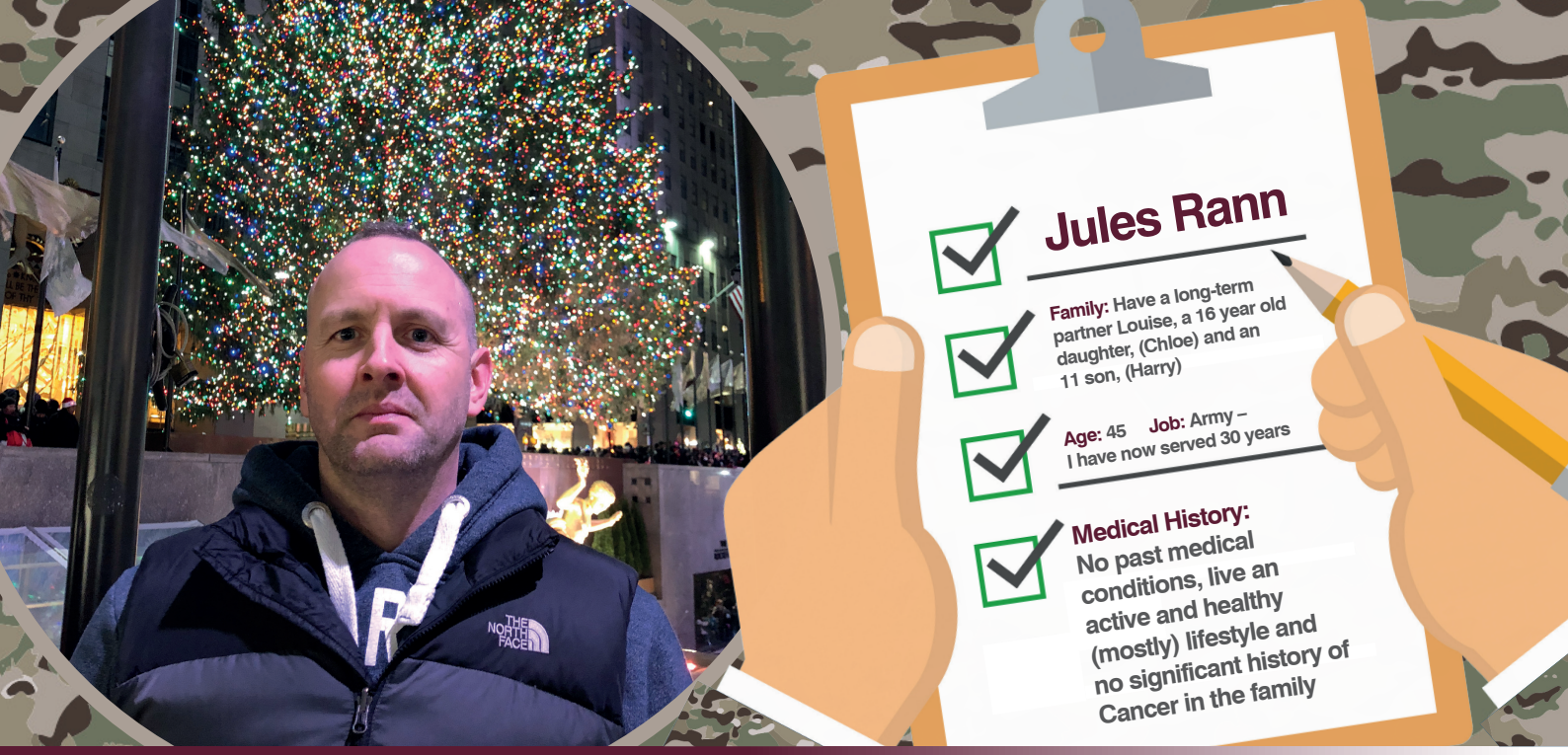


Initial Signs:

I noticed a small lump whilst shaving in Iraq. I initially put it down to the air-con (as I was on a Summer Tour) – when I came back 3 or 4 weeks later there was a visible lump on the left side of my neck. Once back I then went to the Medical Centre at Worthy Down to see the Medical Officer – she then made arrangements for me to undergo testing at Winchester Hospital. I underwent a series blood tests, scans and was booked in for an endoscopy at Southampton Hospital.

Diagnosis Confirmation:

I received a call from a Cancer Research nurse about a week before the endoscopy asking if when they take samples would I mind if they took extra for CRUK. Having not being given my diagnosis at that point I asked if she was telling me I had Cancer – this was followed by a stunned silence.

The way we were notified of the fact I had cancer was at the endoscopy appt. The consultant was preparing for the procedure and asked, "You know why you are here?" and when I replied, "yes for an endoscopy." He said, "but you know why?" You can imagine that incredibly awkward moment, (lots of paper shuffling & looking back at my notes, some clearing of his throat) followed with the 'You have Cancer' line. Not an ideal time to tell my partner & I, as within 5 minutes I was wheeled away, and she was left to cry in the room I had just left...

I was asked at the follow up appointment if I would consider the PATHOS Trial, and I undertook a series of suitability tests for that too. I was willing (and at the time) able to partake, meeting all the requirements.



Telling People:

I only told a limited number of people (and there are still people I work with that think I was on a short tour). For those I did tell I found it easier to explain (not in detail) the treatment I needed before dropping the C bomb. The kids understood it but were emotional, but telling my parents was harder. They struggled to understand the

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process and felt they had done something wrong for me to get it. I took them to the MacMillan Centre in Southampton during one of my appt, and that really helped them to be honest.

Treatment Process:

I was offered the opportunity to have an operation to remove the lump, however after 2 cancelled operations (Nov & Dec), a follow up CT scan showed the lump was too large and complicated to remove. This also meant that I was unable to do the PATHOS trial. So in Jan I started the traditional treatment route. I named my lump little AJ, after a person I work with, he is a good friend and appealed to my sense of humour.

The treatment process from Mask fitting to final Radiotherapy went smoothly, and for me the fact it was regimented made life so much easier. In addition to the Radiotherapy & Chemo I also had bloods taken weekly prior to Chemo day, speech therapist & nutritionals appts. I didn't experience many delays & none were significant. The hospital were cognisant that I live in Reading (so not close to Southampton) and gave me appointments that were convenient for me. I was able to work remotely & worked daily apart from one day when I was really unwell.





Side effects:

I found the process fairly manageable & at times I did wonder what the fuss was about. It was only really the last few days of treatment when my neck started to blister and dry out. Like all I suffered the side effects of the Chemo, but it was only sickness. I also had some episodes when I would pass out if I stood up too quickly.

Recovery:

I was sick during week 1 of recovery and my feeding tube came out – I didn't go to have it re-fitted, I hated the Fortisips anyway, and instead battled to eat fresh food (in tiny amounts). I think this has helped me recover so swiftly, and made eating a little easier than others I know who were under treatment the same time I was. Interestingly enough I was on treatment with a person I served with in Bosnia in the late 90's whom I still keep in touch with.



"I have fallen in love again with running and enjoy it again. This I feel has helped me recover swiftly too."

My recovery has been smooth, my mouth needs less additional lubrication than it did but I still need additional liquid when I eat & my full range of taste has not returned (and I doubt it ever will). There are still some foods I struggle with, but the reality is that I could still be on Fortisip etc and unable to eat at all so I am very happy with a few limitations.

My final thoughts:

- Best diet I have ever had!
- A good process (apart for the notification process)
- The Carer (or significant partner) can some times be left out – and the support doesn't seem to be there in our experience
- Positive mental attitude is key
- Listening to your body & the team (I am very stubborn) they know best, not you...
- Skin Care – really helps during treatment and after – I did a Look Good Feel Better workshop which was fantastic.
- Support Groups – I have found a support group helpful, as you can help each other and discuss way to address issues you may have.

I am on a UAG for Oxford Brook Hospital – in a effort to assist future people who are diagnosed.

Jules Rann

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