

Diagnosed with osteosarcoma aged 16

SARAH DRANSFIELD

"I LIVED A SO CALLED NORMAL LIFE UNTIL I STARTED GETTING SEVERE PAINS IN MY RIGHT KNEE ABOUT THREE MONTHS BEFORE I WAS DIAGNOSED.

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On the 22nd March 2012 aged just 16, Huddersfield teenager Sarah Dransfield was diagnosed with osteosarcoma in her right knee. Sarah describes her life as "normal" before she started having severe pains in her right knee. Three months later Sarah received the cancer diagnosis.

Following concerns from her physio, Sarah was sent for an MRI scan and an x-ray. Prior to Sarah being informed of the diagnosis her parents had been told their daughter had cancer. They faced an agonising 24 hours before the next GP appointment when Sarah was also informed. "I remember when I was called in to see the doctor my Dad stood up and said he was coming in with me, and I wondered why. This was the first time I had ever seen my dad cry"

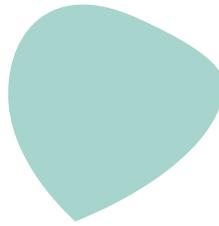
Sarah cried when she was informed she had cancer and had lots of questions for the doctor, but unfortunately she didn't receive many answers to these questions. Some of these unanswered questions still follow Sarah but she is working towards answers.

Informing friends and family that she had cancer was very difficult for Sarah and she chose to break the news to groups of people so she didn't have to deliver the news over and over. She told her brother and grandparents and her friends.

Soon after the diagnosis, Sarah started a full 12-month chemotherapy cycle at the Leeds General Infirmary. Sarah's treatment was intense and included a cocktail of chemotherapy drugs and drugs that resulted in full hair loss and destroyed Sarah's immune system. The majority of the 12 month treatment was spent in hospital either receiving treatment, recovering from treatment or being ill as a result of the treatment.

Three months into the chemotherapy, Sarah was informed that the original plans to replace the affected bone in her leg with metal was no longer possible and that an amputation was necessary.

"I can clearly remember taking the last shower before the operation and knowing this would be the last time with both my legs. I took a photograph."



“I didn’t want to go to hospital for the operation. For a while I didn’t want to leave my room. Looking back now I realised how difficult this time must have been for others as well. My dad had to drive me from Huddersfield to Birmingham to the hospital knowing what was going to happen. It would have been so hard for him.”

On July 12th 2012 Sarah’s right leg was amputated above the knee at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital in Birmingham.

Following the amputation Sarah was informed that the cancer had spread to her lungs. At this point she continued chemotherapy until the following March. She then had two separate operations to remove the cancer from both of her lungs. During treatment Sarah had a number of infections which were treated with IV antibiotics resulting in Sarah being hospitalised for even longer than expected. During this time, Sarah’s blood count was dangerously low and on several occasions she required blood transfusions and platelets.

Having cancer and the intensive treatment that followed really put the strain on relationships. Sarah pays tribute to friends who stood by her. Friends who spent time in hospital with her and continued to support Sarah throughout her ordeal. Her friend Amy who accompanied Sarah to the charity’s ball in 2012 also stayed with her in hospital and at home to help relieve the strain from Sarah’s mum who was always with her. Both Sarah and Amy refer to this time as a dark place with no idea of how long they would be there. They spent time talking about the things they would do when Sarah was well again despite both being well aware that Sarah’s future was uncertain. But Sarah still wrote a list of things they would do when she was well and this helped.

Sarah also made some wonderful new friends during her time in hospital. “At first I didn’t want to talk to the people in the hospital. At the time I just thought, this is not my life, this is not me. But over time I did make friends and they became very important. It made a big difference to know you weren’t the only one.”

“I remember one day a new patient coming onto the ward and we were all together having breakfast and laughing and joking. He must have thought it was odd. I hope that he watched and realised there can still be laughing and joking.”

Sarah learnt to walk again whilst undergoing treatment, attending physio whenever she was out of hospital and physio got easier toward the end of her treatment. Sarah now wears a prosthetic leg every day and attends private physiotherapy to build her strength and improve her walking.

Sarah’s life has changed dramatically and her new life is taking some adjusting to. “When I look back now at my life before all this, it was perfect. I hadn’t planned for life to be like this. Even adjusting to not being looked after anymore is difficult. I think people just think I am better now and that life goes on. I know that life goes on but my life is not how I had imagined or planned it to be.”

Despite Sarah’s dramatic life changing illness she wants to use her experiences to support other cancer patients especially in areas where Sarah’s support was lacking. Sarah is a Youth Ambassador for The Laura Crane Youth Cancer Trust.