



Diagnosed with testicular cancer aged 20

STEVE MILLER

"HAVING MY TESTICLE REMOVED REALLY KNOCKED MY SELF CONFIDENCE. LOTS OF THINGS KEPT GOING THROUGH MY MIND, SUCH WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN I MET A GIRL AND HOW WOULD I EXPLAIN IT TO THEM. NOW I JUST SEE IT AS A REMINDER OF WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH. IT HELPS ME LOOK UPON LIFE WITH NO FEAR, AND CHALLENGE MYSELF TO LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL."

Steve Miller was 20 years old and in his final year studying Human Physiology at Leeds University when he found out he had cancer. It was April 2009 and Steve had gone out for a run. He explained: "I just went out for a run as usual but I slipped off the kerb, which caused a severe pain in my right testicle. The following morning the pain had turned into a dull ache. I did check for any lumps but couldn't find anything, but decided to go to the doctors and get checked out just to be on the safe side."

The doctor referred Steve to the hospital immediately, as she suspected a testicular torsion. Steve went to A&E and was sent for an ultrasound. Steve adds: "I went back to A&E after the ultrasound and was told to wait for the A&E Consultant. After a short wait I was taken into a room and told I might have testicular cancer and that they were going to keep me in over the weekend and operate on Monday. I was devastated. I was on my own so had no one to talk to – it was one of the worst moments of my life."

Steve continues: "I couldn't bring myself to tell my mum and dad that I had cancer, I thought it best not to worry them as it hadn't been confirmed that it was cancer." Steve is from St Helens, and didn't want his Mum and Dad jumping in the car driving to Leeds in a state.

He had his operation the following Monday and had his left testicle removed.

Steve explained, "Having my testicle removed really knocked my self confidence. Lots of things kept going through my mind, such what would happen when I met a girl and how would I explain it to them. Now I just see it as a reminder of what I've been through. It helps me look upon life with no fear, and challenge myself to live life to the full."

Steve spent a week in hospital and then returned home to his parents but unfortunately contracted an infection. He ended up going to his local hospital and was given antibiotics and sent home. During the night the wound started bleeding and Steve's parents took him back to hospital where he was admitted and stayed for 10 days. During this time Steve was still waiting for his oncology appointment at Leeds following his operation to see whether he'd had cancer.

Steve was in his last year at University and it was close to his finals, he explained, "Uni was actually a great distraction; I was terrified I would have to do my third year again, but they were very supportive and gave me an extension for my dissertation, and I continued working really hard."

Steve then returned to Leeds and met with the Germ Cell Nurse Specialist and then a week later with the Consultant who confirmed Steve's tumour was cancerous, a stage 1 metastatic teratoma, but the great news was it had been diagnosed early and had not spread.

Steve had to visit the hospital every month for his bloods and for a scan, and three months later he received a phone call from the hospital asking him to go and see the specialist, "I knew from what she said and how she said it the cancer was

back, it was the day after my 21st birthday and I was totally devastated.”

Steve returned to St James’ Hospital and his fears were confirmed that the cancer had spread to his lymph nodes from his stomach; the tumour was about 2.5cm. “I had researched chemotherapy and knew what was involved. I really didn’t want it, but knew it was necessary. I prepared myself mentally for it. I stopped applying for jobs, sorted out my finances and sorted out all my clothes - I like to be organised, so I was ready to give myself over to the doctors.”

Steve chose to stay in Leeds because of the Teenage Cancer Unit. “The TCU was fantastic. I initially spent time on the adult cancer ward. That was the only time throughout my cancer that I felt terrified. I witnessed an older person having CPR and unfortunately dying – it really scared me.”

Even though Steve had mentally prepared himself for chemotherapy nothing could prepare him physically. “It was like I’d been hit by a train. I had massive mood swings, terrible mouth ulcers, throat infections and became neutropenic (a low white blood cell count). I was on steroids and gained three stone in weight. I lost my appetite and of course my hair.”

“One of my lowest points was going into McDonalds one day when I felt like eating. I ordered my food and sat down to eat, then heard two people say, ‘Oh my god, he’s disgusting, him over there.’ I knew they were referring to me. I put my hat back on and took my food home.”

This was a particularly difficult period for Steve, he had lost his independence and was living back at home with his parents, he didn’t want to burden his friends and he was terrified of going out. It really hit him when he went out cycling, something he did lots of, he cycled to the end of his street and that was it, he was exhausted. This was three weeks into his treatment - he had another six weeks to go.

“The last week of chemo was the worst. Because I was neutopenic, my parents had to take me to St James’ between treatments as I wasn’t well. My veins were non-existent and people kept putting needles into me, which really made me angry. I was also very scared of infection. Most of my friends who have died from cancer, died as a result of infection.”

Luckily Steve pulled through and had his last chemotherapy session. “It was a bit of an anti-climax. I was expecting to feel well immediately but I didn’t.”

It is November 2011 and Steve is two years in remission and is still going for check-ups. He goes every six months and when he reaches the five year remission point he’s going to have a party to celebrate.

Steve’s adds, “The best piece of advice I can give to anyone who thinks they may have testicular cancer is ‘Get it checked out! Get over dropping your pants, it will take five minutes and if it’s nothing then you’ve lost nothing. My friend whose cancer was four to five months more advanced than mine is no longer here to tell his story, so please get checked!”

It took Steve a year to gain his confidence, get back his identity and find himself again. Earlier this year he applied to become paramedic and was one of the 18 accepted out of 1500 applicants, he explained “Cancer did that for me. I have no fear now. It gave me the drive to work hard. Nothing fazes me and I’m not scared of anything anymore.”

