

Secondary Breast Cancer Diagnosis May 2015 to the Spine And Sacrum

Ruth Urquhart

ex-Headteacher , United Kingdom

Abstract

I was first diagnosed with this disease when I was 37 and had hoped that as the 10 year landmark came and went that I was not going to revisit this disease. I was wrong, at the age of 51 I suffered excruciating pain to my spine and was told that my cancer had returned and was now incurable. Previous visits to my GP with my deteriorating back condition had not considered a recurrence of my disease instead the GP thought I was suffering from acute muscle spasms!

I have lived with cancer as a young woman and mother. My initial diagnosis was delayed by 6 months as my female GP considered me to be too young and despite my mother's diagnosis, she felt I was unlikely to fall victim of this disease. Only pressurising the system resulted in my eventual mammogram and diagnosis. I pursued a clinical negligence claim 3 years after my diagnosis and won.

Arriving home to three very young children (3, 6 and 8) was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. Terrified myself, but unable to show this emotion to my children. How do you tell your children what is happening to their mummy? How do you reassure them when you don't feel reassured yourself? Financially? How do you cope when you are off work for such a long time?

The fear of recurrence influenced many decisions I made as a parent. Perpetually scared that I would not be there for them; I was always considering the life skills that I was imparting to them trying to prepare them for life without me without them being aware.

Personally, as a woman, an early surgical menopause and all that it brings tested my relationship with my husband. My self-image has never been good since diagnosis.

My secondary diagnosis was given to me and I was sent home with pain killers and an appointment to see an oncologist. No other support. I was broken. It turned my life upside down and I have spent the past 3 and a half years trying to adjust to the huge uncertainties that the diagnosis presents me with.

I do now advocate on behalf of patients, I have appeared on BBC World News and have been in dialogue with key stakeholders in this world. Access to drugs and trials being key issues that I feel very passionate about.

I would feel very honoured to speak at the summit. I have a wealth of experience as a patient as a young woman, mother, wife and also as a middle- aged woman with secondary breast cancer. who has had to give up her career and life as it was to live with this disease.

Biography: I am a wife, mother of 3 young adult sons and now ex-Headteacher. Retiring from my post as a result of my secondary

diagnosis 2 and a half years ago. My future is uncertain and many family landmarks I had hoped to experience are a faint, unlikely hope rather than probability.