

Robert Frew Medical Partners

Remarkable Story About One of Our Patients!

Dear All,

A Wickford father who was given just seven years to live after being diagnosed with incurable blood cancer continues to defy the odds 16 years on thanks to a life-saving transplant from his sister.

In 2005, Andrew Bate was fit and healthy – cycling, swimming and dancing each week. He enjoyed work and felt blessed to have a loving wife and family. Life could hardly be more perfect. That all changed when he was enjoying a long weekend in Rome with his wife Pauline. Andrew when he suddenly felt winded and began to struggle to walk. He powered through, assuming he had just pulled a muscle in his abdomen.

By the time he landed back in the UK, the pain had spread to his back and neck and was so severe that he was rushed to hospital by ambulance. There, doctors put his symptoms down to a ruptured muscle. Far from easing up, his pain only worsened, and Andrew found himself struggling to move and bedridden.

After going back and forth to the GP, in February 2006, an X-ray revealed Andrew had a plasmacytoma, a cancerous tumour, which had caused his neck to break. He swiftly received radiotherapy, which effectively treated the tumour. Sadly, his recovery was short lived – tests revealed a tumour pressing on his rib cage and 11 months after his initial diagnosis, Andrew, then 52, was given the news that his plasmacytoma had progressed to myeloma.

Andrew reflects on receiving this diagnosis:

“To me it was a double whammy. To hear ‘cancer’, ‘incurable’ and ‘seven years to live’ in the same sentence was a lot. My consultant’s opening comments were, ‘Well Andrew, I’m afraid you’ve got myeloma. It is treatable but incurable and the prognosis is that you probably have seven years or slightly more. That is all you can expect’. This was devastating, but after a few seconds my reply was, ‘Well what are we going to do about it?’”.

“We now had to tell our family for the second time that I had cancer and that this time it was incurable. Everyone was shocked and lost for words, but I was totally focused on ridding my body of myeloma, being strong and never giving in”.

Despite his prognosis, Andrew has remarkably been in remission for 15 years now – defying the odds.

Andrew received chemotherapy and tandem stem cell transplant – first, a stem cell transplant using his own cells, followed six months later by a donor transplant from his sister Cathy. Andrew remembers how he felt during those days of treatment:

“At the time there was a 25 per cent mortality rate but I said, ‘I’ll take the 75 percent’. Cathy and my wife Pauline sat either side of my bed and we all held hands. The nurse, Raj, had a small bag containing Cathy’s stem cells, the needle was inserted and slowly the cells dripped into me. The feeling that my sister had given me life was, and always will be, so emotional.”

“I am extremely fortunate and have so many people to thank for my life – especially Pauline who has been with me every step of the way. I am such a lucky guy – thank you will never be enough.”

In 2022 Andrew spent another Christmas with his family – including his five children, ten grandchildren and four great-grandchildren!

“When I wake up in the morning I think ‘Yippee it’s going to be another great day’. Family is everything to me. What I put my wife through is just horrendous, but she’s been there with me. She’s seen me go through the pain, and not be able to walk, crawl from the bedroom to the bathroom. It’s absolute torture for your partner and nearest and dearest because there’s nothing they can do”.

But here I am, I’ve been in remission coming up 15 years. Most people think, when they hear they have incurable cancer, that their life is over. I did too. I had that thought for about 30 seconds and look where I am now. I try to give people a bit of hope. Life is not over. Life is for living.”

A huge thank you to Andrew for allowing us to share his remarkable story of courage, strength and determination to beat this, we all wish you and your family all the best.

