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*First reactions
to being told you need
a laryngectomy*

SUNDERLAND LARYNGECTOMEE CLUB

in conjunction with

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and

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LARYNGECTOMEE CLUBS

Common feelings and emotions

Initial reactions to being told that you have cancer vary from person to person; there is no right or wrong way to cope with this sort of news. You may be disbelieving, angry, wonder ‘why me?’, there may be feelings of fear, numbness or resignation. What is important to remember is that feelings and mood swings may be extreme as you adjust to the news that you have cancer and will need major surgery.

Here are some people’s reactions to being told they had cancer of the larynx and/or pharynx. You may recognise some of these feelings of disbelief, denial and fear.

“When the surgeon told me I had larynx cancer it was the very worst moment of my life. I really thought it was inevitable I was going to die.”

“I was stunned and disbelieving, I was so shocked I cannot remember driving home. At first I rejected the thought of having the operation – it was my family and a laryngectomy visitor who persuaded me.”

(GD)

At times you may feel more resigned and even admit that underneath you’ve had a feeling something ‘wasn’t right’.

“When he first told me it was what I expected as I had been having difficulty with swallowing for a few months – at least I knew the worst now.”

(GD)

“I just wanted to go home after he’d told me – but I also wanted to know what would happen next.”

(BD)

Life after laryngectomy

Although people do remember these feelings vividly, it is important to remember that in time (after you’ve recovered from the operation and re-adjusted your life) you will be able to look back and will feel differently. Life does continue. These people describe

how they feel now they have adjusted to life after their laryngectomy.

SJ remembers at the time thinking:

“Straight away I thought I was going to die, I even thought of doing myself in.”

But 2 years on he says:

“I do everything in my daily routine that I did before I got throat cancer, I exercise, I do my house, my garden and go out with friends, have a drink and a bet.”

SC says:

“I am very happy to be alive 3 years after the operation.”

“I think of the alternatives and I’m alive and that it gave me an extension to my life I wouldn’t otherwise have had.”

(GD)

Your family are also affected

It is important not to forget that your immediate family will also be experiencing the emotional turmoil of the diagnosis.

“The worst time was when the consultant told me the initial radiotherapy hadn’t worked and told us my husband would have to have a laryngectomy. I felt ashamed because I kept thinking things like – how will I manage if he dies ... of course he didn’t die and life has an entirely different meaning.”

(SJ)

“The pacts and promises I made with God if he would let me be alright.”

(BS)

“I was shocked by the diagnosis. I had known for sometime that there could be no other explanation for my husband’s condition

but to actually hear the consultant give the diagnosis was shattering.”

(WR)

Coping with your feelings

You may recognise a few of these feelings described by some of the people and their families who have gone through the trauma of diagnosis of cancer of the larynx /and/or pharynx. They are just normal reactions to difficult and painful news.

You may feel you find it easier to cope with what you are experiencing on your own or within your family but it may help to talk to someone outside your family or immediate circle of friends: a nurse from the ward, the Macmillan nurse, the doctor, the social worker or speech and language therapist.

Many people also find it helpful and encouraging to meet someone who has already had a laryngectomy to see that it is possible to lead a fulfilling life after the operation.

If you do feel you want to speak to someone please do not hesitate to ask or think they are too busy– they are there to help you and your family come to terms with what is happening and will only be too happy to help.

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