

Overview – When Cancer First Came into Our Lives

It will be a shock at the start, and you're not thinking about what is happening in the future, but you have to come to the realisation this is going to be a total different thing to what it was in the past.

When someone is first diagnosed and...you know, you could find that you maybe have four or five different hospital appointments, all happening within a very short space of time. I remember Colin having two appointments in one day. They were both in the same places, but they were hours apart. Looking back, you know, trying to adjust appointments, not being afraid to say to someone, "Look, can we change the appointment? Can we get those appointments close together?"

When we went for appointments, it was difficult to divide attention between supporting Betty and absorbing the information we were given, and we actually did miss some of the information.

I could see a consultant, I could see him, I could tell he was talking to me, but I just couldn't make sense of what he was saying, and then I used to go home and get myself worked up because I was all, "Why didn't I ask this question?" and "Why didn't I ask that question?" So, after a while, I started recording the conversations we were having, and I was able to go home and listen and get more answers to my questions.

When you go to hospital, you'll get there and you're seeing your consultant, nurses, or whatever, if there's something you want to ask, do ask. If there's more than one question, try and write it down so it's fresh in your head.

Don't feel stupid. I think some of us still feel they're the professional and we're not, right? Don't feel like that. They're people just the same as us. If you don't understand something, ask them to explain.

Keep asking questions and don't be fobbed off with platitudes.

I can remember whenever Colin was first diagnosed, and there was a stream of people starting to call at the house, you know, people wanting to come and see him, and one of the things I would say is that it's so important that you have time both as a couple and as a family on your own to deal with what you've been told.

It's quite common for friends to go away and you think they don't care and... You meet them on the street – as a carer, I have met people downtown in shops that have sort of turned their back and have crossed to the other side of the road, not because they don't like me, not because they don't care, but because they just don't know how to handle it or what to say. But it will go away, and these people will return into your life again, and you just don't hold it against them because they're just frightened.