



“... no crazy trips, skydive, race around chasing the bucket list. This will be my death, and my way to live well until then...”

[Alan Taman](#)

The name badge gave it away to my wife, Wendy. A former ITU nurse, midwife and now health visitor, she clocked it as soon as we entered the consulting room: ‘*Lung Cancer Nurse Specialist*’.

I missed it. But then, I missed a lot of things.

I missed not pushing harder for a GP appointment when the cough didn't go away.

I missed not pushing for a chest X ray when the antibiotics were pointless and the sputum sample clear.

Busy semi-retired life, still fighting to stop the NHS from falling apart after 10 years of campaigning. And still, that troublesome cough. That afternoon fatigue, which I put down to being as ‘old’ as I am (69).

And now I'm dying.

Or I will be... from stage 4 adenocarcinoma, *mets* in both lungs though thankfully not yet showing anywhere else.

What we don't know... is when.

Beyond the vague range of months already given.

We'll never know if pushing harder would have made any difference.

Lung cancer is a sneaky bastard, and...

...will have already spread by the time up to half of people get a diagnosis. Never smoked, never been near asbestos. Low risk.

I got it.

The first weeks were straightforward on one level; do what you can to ‘*put your affairs in order*’.

So we did just that. Powers of Attorney, remortgaging, checking what financial help we could get (*some, not much, Wendy still works*); we even went as far as finding an undertakers to suit us.

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*...doctors are notoriously bad at making predictions!*

All those old certificates hidden in bookshelves gone, and old photos hidden in the attic, passed to others or gone. Why leave that for Wendy or the kids? All those heavy jobs in the garden I'd put off.

Emotionally describing it as a 'roller coaster' does not hint at what you go through. Because ...

*...roller coasters are in fun-fairs, and the last thing this is is fun.*

You can be upbeat one moment, talking of your own disease if others ask, sharing time with them, laughing, enjoying life, knowing yours is running out a lot quicker than you thought it would.

Then, the dark rabbit holes open up. Terror, anger, desolation, overwhelming sadness, loneliness. Pick any three, at any one time.

All of them, around 3 am.

The most surprising one was loneliness, I wasn't expecting that. Wendy wants to nurse me to the end, and the palliative care team are on board for that. She knows how, so I'm very lucky. But, she hurts too. She is losing me. That can

make it feel like you are so alone.

I have to say, the emotional support you get right at the start doesn't address that as much as it could. Why?

Because staff are stretched, resources are threadbare, people are crying out for help far louder than help can be given, and policies reflect the state Trusts are in.

Here, right here, is where the real cost of not investing, strikes home. People, hurting, when they could have hurt less. The real cost. Knowing all that made it no easier for us.

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*I used to think being told you have cancer is the hardest thing. It isn't. Telling those you love you have cancer is far, far harder...*

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... because that's your choice, and it hurts. Hurts them . Hurts you. No choice, really.

Physically I'm still in good shape. Still walk the dogs over a mile a

day. I gather that means the oncologists, *who I finally get to meet next week*, will probably hit me hard with chemo (my tumour has no targetable mutations – that would have made a huge difference but wasn't to be).

My medical friends remind me, a *survival distribution* is not a personal prediction (and one added 'and doctors are notoriously bad at making predictions!').

I do my level best to stay positive, with death no longer something you hope is years away.

People are so ... nice. Kind. Genuine.

I've spoken to my wider family more in the past few weeks than I have for years, in some cases.

All of this helps.

I know the specialists will do what they can, and it isn't as bleak as it was, and we're getting better at this all the time.

I know there are thousands of people seeing this every day. But, I know where my journey ends.

It stops.

Well, it does for us all.

I'm not one to go on crazy trips, skydive, race around chasing the bucket list. This will be my death, and my way to

live well until then. I've always handled words for a living, and Roy suggested I write. If it reaches out to even a few, makes a difference, that's all any writer can

ask. I am glad for the chance.

**Walk with me a while, if you will.**

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