



Mary's Story

Mary Bodolay

About a year ago I felt a throbbing sensation in my neck when I slept on my right side. At times it would wake me up at night. I was becoming concerned and would check out my already existing goitre in the mirror frequently. Many thoughts raced through my mind: Was it my thyroid? Was it an issue with my carotid artery? I have had several years of disabling fibromyalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis; was this now another symptom of that? Something did not sit well. I had had years of swallowing issues due to the goitre; something just did not feel right.

I mentioned it during my annual physical, but all my blood work came back unchanged. Did I need to worry? A few more months passed and I felt uneasy. I went back to the family doctor who ordered an ultrasound. The results came back and now I needed a biopsy....I had had one several years back in my 30's. I am now in my mid-50s. The biopsy frightened me, along with the prospect of possible cancer. It seemed like everyone I spoke with recounted stories of people they knew in similar situations. Good or bad, these stories were offered to me and increased my anxiety.

I trawled the internet grasping every piece of information I could, not a smart move. I should have stayed exploring web sites such as the Thyroid Foundation of Canada (www.thyroid.ca) or the American Thyroid Foundation. On other sites, celebrities were disclosing their cancer scares, surgeries and complications, the sound of reason disappearing further as my anxiety grew. I wanted the medical system to speed up quickly to accommodate me, but who the heck am I? I'm not special. I went on what seemed a very lengthy waiting list, but in fact it was just the standard timeframe for everyone in Ontario.

I had the biopsy done near my home, north of the city. The doctor was wonderful, skilled, and he tried to ease my fears. The nurses and staff were professional but caring. I knew from all the sources of information I had digested, most nodules are benign, but some are cancer. I waited for the results, to be told the worst of my fears was now a reality and I needed surgery. I cried, made plans for my funeral, settled my debts, all before I spoke to the specialist. He was a wonderful surgeon whom I knew through a family member. He was well known in the



Mary and husband Stephen

area, a top-notch skilled surgeon with a wonderful sense of humour and a calming, caring demeanour. I felt very lucky. A month later, I had another lucky break as a cancellation in the Operating Room schedule was now mine.

The skilled surgeon and the wonderful staff at the hospital now became part of my story. I was approached by professional, caring individuals who, although they looked after many thyroidectomy patients, treated my fears and numerous questions with respect. I am now 2 weeks post op, feeling terrific, regaining my strength, and feel that my story can be a help to others.

A diagnosis of papillary thyroid cancer understandably comes with a package of fear and anxiety attached to it for the patient, but my advice to anyone who faces this is to find a reliable website such as www.thyroid.ca, and not go into chat rooms on every site you can find, because most of what you hear is uninformed. Stick to the information you receive from the specialist, family doctor and endocrinologist; otherwise you can cause yourself unnecessary stress. If I could go back I would approach this by requesting resource material and preparing several questions on paper before seeing the specialist or surgeon to ensure I get answers to all my questions. I was glad to have a family member with me who sat and recorded all the information the specialist gave me. My anxiety would have taken over me and I would have forgotten 90% of what was said just after leaving the office.

I'm not sure where I head from here on my path to recovery although I do know I will be seeing a specialist eventually at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. I try to be a sound resource for others who have heard I had thyroid cancer and I give them your website address to go to, which is quite informative because many people do not know there are several types of thyroid cancer and treatments, and that not every nodule or growth is cancer. Every path is different, as every story is, as every person is unique. This is just my story.

(Update: Mary had her first radioactive treatment in August last year. Her second will be July this year, and she is hopeful that will be the end of her treatment.)