

Cancer and its impact on our mental wellbeing

One of the things those of us who have had cancer tend not to discuss with friends, family and especially with our employers is that the emotional and psychological impact of cancer is often as great if not greater than the physical consequences of treatment.

We grieve for a life we have lost, we remain fearful of recurrence not just for months or years but often for the rest of our lives, we lose confidence in our bodies given that in many cases we didn't feel ill when we were first diagnosed.

All we want is to 'be normal' to 'return to normal', to put the clock back. And at the same time, our families, friends and colleagues desperately want that too; they want to hear that we are well, that we are fine, that we are 'cured'.

In a recent joint [press release](#) Breast Cancer Care and Mind highlighted the impact of cancer on our mental health, reporting that a recent survey of 3000 women with breast cancer in the UK revealed that that 'a third (33%) experience anxiety for the first time in their lives after their diagnosis and treatment. Shockingly, almost half (45%) experience continuous fear that the cancer may return, which can severely impact day-to-day life.' They go on to report that 'damaged body image, anxieties about the cancer returning and debilitating long-term side effects can disrupt identities and shatter confidence, leaving people feeling incredibly lonely, and at odds with friends, family and the outside world.'

As Dr Peter Harvey says in his excellent article ['After the treatment finishes then what?'](#)

'...once heard, the diagnosis of cancer can never be forgotten. Whatever your prognosis, whatever your hopes, whatever your personality, the second that you know that you have cancer your life changes irrevocably.'

In our experience there are no easy or simple ways to deal with these feelings. Keeping busy, taking some regular exercise if possible and good nutrition (including some cake!) can help. What we do know for sure, however, is that the end of treatment is really the start of something else, of rebuilding your life and regaining control over it. Moreover, by providing practical, one-to one coaching that enables people to return to work, to integrate cancer into their lives and to move forward, we believe we have been able to play an important part in the psychological and emotional rehabilitation of many cancer patients.