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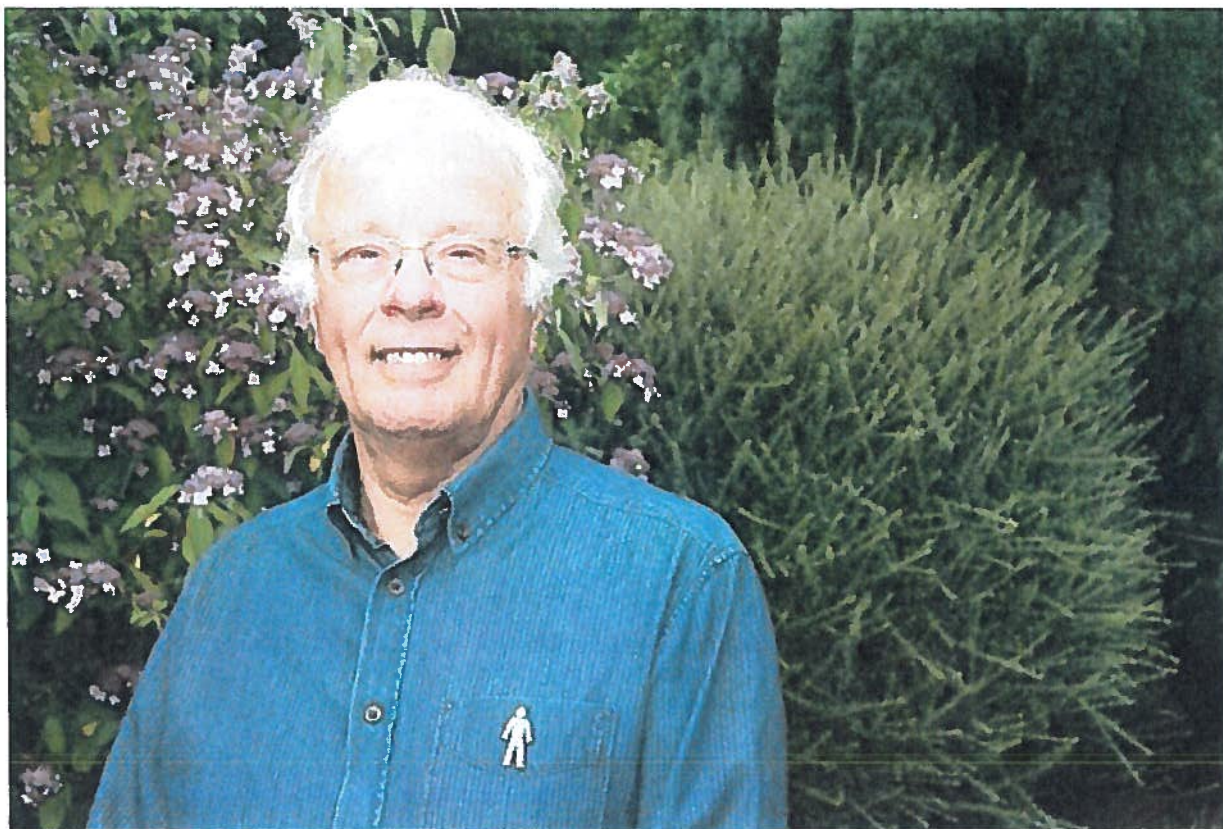
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Coulsdon campaigner wants to see an end to 'postcode lottery' in prostate cancer care

By Croydon Advertiser | Posted: August 10, 2014



CAMPAIGNER: Peter Ford is trying to help other sufferers after beating prostate cancer

Comments (6)

SINCE he was given the all-clear from prostate cancer, Peter Ford has devoted most of his time and energy to raising awareness of one of Britain's biggest killers, as TOM MATTHEWS reports...

LAST year, about 200 men in Croydon were told the devastating words 'you have prostate cancer'. A quarter of those weren't expected to survive.

Just over five years ago, Peter Ford was one of those given the news.

He has since spent much of his spare time campaigning with Prostate Cancer UK for better treatment, information and aftercare for those suffering from the disease.

He's visited Parliament, given talks to conferences and dined alongside John Major at Lord's as part of his work for the charity.

Given the all-clear after an operation in February 2009, a year later Peter performed a handstand at the summit of Snowdon, raising £2,300 in the process.

The 70-year-old, from Coulsdon, got involved after his own experience of treatment at Croydon's Mayday hospital (now Croydon University Hospital).

"I wasn't particularly happy with the treatment in Croydon," he said. "The diagnosis took so long.

"The problem was not so much the conditions, but rather the way the place was managed. I was told my biopsy would take two weeks; it ended up taking 11.

"If you know you have cancer and it might be growing inside you, you're going to get irritated by that."

Peter was given two options – surgery or radiotherapy – and he asked the nurse which was better for him. She told him she wasn't qualified to say, so he asked for the opinions of the experts.

"The surgeon recommended surgery and the radiotherapist recommended radiotherapy," he said.

"This is life-changing stuff, I thought, 'where do I go now?' Then I found out Prostate Cancer UK had a helpline and within half an hour it was sorted. They gave me information which no one else had.

"I chose the surgery, it was a no-brainer."

But the process was far from perfect, and Peter decided to requested a transfer to Guy's Hospital.

"The biggest stress really was, having found out, not knowing how the hospital were going to deal with it properly, having to find out for myself and pick my own treatment," Peter said.

"You don't know the subject, you're being asked to pick from two options and you don't know what the consequences are."

Peter has since visited Parliament regularly, alongside other volunteers, to lobby MPs to accept new guidelines for the treatment of prostate cancer, all with the aim of making sure every man diagnosed with the disease has access to the best possible care.

He said: "It's an overworked phrase, but postcode lottery comes into it.

"In some places hospitals have fabulous treatment, but no information or aftercare. It's very much a patchwork quilt and that applies not only to information on treatments, but after support too.

"If you've had half of your insides out, you're not going to be functioning properly, you need that help.

"For example, only two-thirds of men have access to a clinical nurse specialist, an expert who should be there through their entire treatment."

Part of the work of the charity is to plug the gaps the NHS may not fill and to reinforce to those in power what needs improvement, said Peter.

"A lot of it is writing to people at higher levels and hoping that things filter down," he added.

"The problem is the NHS can't seem to do everything and charities probably have much more contact with patients up close. In many cases, they are as well trained to give guidance.

"I think there's room for both the NHS to be providing a level of service across the country, and charities could be and should be filling in the gaps.

"But, we have to alert Parliament to the main issues of the day. Individual hospitals can't give a wider picture of what the issues are, charities are in a better position to give that."

Peter is hopeful their work at Parliament is making a difference.

"The first time we went to the Houses of Parliament there were just ten of us. This time there were 31 and around 80-90 MPs turned up.

"Hopefully, we're really getting our message across."

HEALTH TRUST STRESSES IMPROVEMENTS

SINCE Peter's experience at Mayday Hospital, Croydon Health Services NHS Trust says it has implemented a range of measures to improve care for cancer patients at the hospital (now Croydon University Hospital).

A spokesman for the trust said: "We are sorry to hear of Peter's experience in 2009 and we are working hard to make sure that poor care is a thing of the past; we have recently implemented the recommendations of the London Cancer Alliance for how to treat patients with prostate cancer, and a new consultant will be starting with the trust in October.

"The recommendations include our doctors from surgery and oncology working together, along with specialists from St George's and the Royal Marsden, to agree which treatments should be recommended and which can be discussed in detail with the patient at a dedicated clinic at Croydon University Hospital.

"We would welcome the opportunity to show Peter the improvements that have been made to our cancer services since he was with us and will be getting in touch with him to offer him a visit."

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