

## ANNE WARDLE - Sutton Coldfield



*“I’ve never smoked in my life but because of mouth cancer I have had to give up my job as a swimming coach and struggle to eat properly. I feel lucky though, because if I had been diagnosed five years earlier it would never have been found until it was too late!”*

Earlier this year 47-year-old Mum of three, Anne Wardle, from Sutton Coldfield in the West Midlands was treated for mouth cancer. Below is her story.

“ I was never really aware of mouth cancer before I was diagnosed.

Even if I had been I would never have thought I would be at risk of getting it. I am a non smoker and only ever had the odd glass of red wine with a meal at the weekend. However, as I was to find out, it can affect anyone.

It seems to me that the dangers of mouth cancer have never really been advertised. Certainly not in the way other cancers are.

I first became concerned that something could be wrong when I **felt a lump in my neck.**

At first we just thought it was a swollen gland or a cyst. However, a CT scan revealed it was secondary cancer.

Even more worrying, the doctors had no idea where the primary cancer was!

It was decided that I would need a PET scan to locate the primary cancer. However, these are very expensive and so are restricted to worthy cases. I had a nerve wracking meeting with a specialist who was to assess whether I my case was deserving of one. Fortunately they said yes!

The result was that the primary cancer was located in my tonsil and I had a radical neck dissection and tonsillectomy plus chemotherapy and radiotherapy to treat it. I also had to have a tooth out and then a PEG tube fitted as I was unable to eat.

Thankfully this was successful and I am now on the road to recovery.

It has been a very stressful time. I have had to give up my job coaching swimming. Following the neck dissection my left arm is now quite weak, so rescuing drowning children would prove a bit tricky! The treatment has also damaged my saliva glands, leaving my mouth dry, so I can't shout any more either.

You have to be positive though. The technology used to locate my primary cancer would not have been available five years ago and the condition would not have been diagnosed until it was too late!

My operation was on June 5<sup>th</sup> and I can play sports again now. My neck is very stiff and I have limited left arm movement but I am still enjoying playing golf and tennis.

Of course there is always the chance that it will return but it is something you live with. All my doctors have said how positive I am and how being positive helps the healing process. Having good friends is a great help too!

My condition has certainly increased awareness among my friends, not just of mouth cancer, but of general health too. General health checks have been the order of the day since my diagnosis, which is a good thing.

Of course my family has been very upset by the whole experience, but they are starting to get used to me not being able to eat or eating very slowly.

I am still seeing oncologist, surgeon, speech therapist and dietician but am slowly getting back to normal.

I was fortunate that the condition was treated before it is too late. People need to check their mouths regularly and be aware of any changes to ensure they have the best chance of successful treatment should they develop mouth cancer.

Remember, it can happen to anyone!

Your dentist is your best friend and you should always keep to your check ups!

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