

## Cancer in adolescents and young adults – a personal perspective

**Dr Jason Bainbridge, 29, was diagnosed with testicular cancer at the age of 27. Jason, of Battery Point, is a lecturer in journalism, media studies and communications at the University of Tasmania.**

“I was finishing my PhD in Brisbane and doing some casual work at Myer just before Christmas when I found out I had testicular cancer. I went to my GP about some swelling and a dull ache in my groin – I thought I’d just knocked myself pushing trolleys of Christmas puddings, and expected the doctor would give me something for the swelling and I’d be right back to work.

“As it was, I didn’t end up going back to work for months. X-rays and blood tests showed something was seriously wrong, and a couple of days later I was told that 80 per cent of my right testicle was a tumour.

“It all happened so quickly there wasn’t really time to think about how I felt. The hardest thing was deciding how to tell other people. Until then I’d always thought cancer was something that happened to older people, that it was a death sentence. Now I know that that’s not always true, and I was ‘lucky’ in that the form of cancer I had has one of the best survival rates.

“I had surgery to remove the testicle and a few weeks of radiotherapy, and spent a few more months recovering. My work, studies and social life all had to go on hold.

“I’m feeling great now and the cancer hasn’t come back, but I’ll be having regular check-ups for a long time to come. There’s a sense that once you’ve had your treatment it’s all over, but that’s not really true. I still go to the doctor every three months for blood tests and a chest X-ray or CAT Scan.

“I had great support from my girlfriend, family, friends, work and uni during my diagnosis and treatment. But the one thing I found really difficult was the financial side of things. I’d moved out of home and interstate some time ago, was studying, and working part-time to pay the rent. I hadn’t had a chance to get on a career path and had little saved, when this hit me. Even with private health insurance, the gaps I had to meet from my own pocket were huge. When you’re going through something like this the last thing you feel like doing is lining up at Medicare and having to search for more money to pay medical bills. I’ve only just paid off my credit card debts, two years later.

“Another long term concern is the possible effect of the cancer treatment on my ability to have children. It’s strange that you don’t think about something like that, until there’s a possibility you might not have them.

“But there was a positive to all this. My cancer experience really helped me put everything into perspective. I value life a lot more – and the people in it. And I don’t get so stressed about things – because they could always be worse.”