

## As she battles leukaemia, Katherine Sinfield, wife of editor

# A week of ups and downs on the ward as Katherine battles on



### Katherine's Diary

THE wife of Ashbourne News Telegraph editor Stephen Sinfield, who is battling against leukaemia, has described in her own words daily life on the hospital ward where she is confined to in her fight against the disease. Katherine Sinfield, 32, needs daily doses of antibiotics, fungal drips and blood transfusions after being diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia in April. She has remained in hospital, in Birmingham, for the last six weeks after doctors said her only hope of survival was to receive a bone marrow transplant. Last month, the News Telegraph launched its Take Five Minutes campaign in a bid to locate a suitable donor, not just for Katherine, but for anyone who is in her position and to encourage our readers to give blood, an essential resource for anyone suffering with cancer. Here, Katherine describes life on the ward and her daily battle

against cancer and against her increasing boredom of being confined on the ward. For more information on how to become a bone marrow donor, call the National Blood Service Donor helpline on 0300 123 2323.

**Monday, July 22**  
Today marked the start of my fifth week in Birmingham and although I long for some good news on my cells, I am going to have to wait a little longer. I started a new drip last night which is designed to kick-start my cells following the Flag/Ida cocktail of chemotherapy drugs - this chemical mixture must have really knocked my cells for six. The good news is that the doctors hope my cells should have replenished enough to allow me off the ward by the weekend or maybe at the start of next week - either way, it means I have a few more days on the ward. It also looks as though I am going to have to have a skin biopsy taken on Wednesday from the rash on my feet. Although the rash has nearly cleared, the doctors still want to take a few slithers of skin to see what it is. Apparently the injection given to numb the area before they take their samples can be quite painful so I'm not looking forward to Wednesday. I haven't been given a time slot, so I cannot sit watching the clock. I will only get to find out its imminent when a porter arrives with a wheelchair. As for my other treatments, I have been on my usual potassium and anti fungal drips along with my antibiotics. News coverage on the royal baby made the evening more

entertaining than usual.

**Tuesday, July 23**  
I didn't sleep particularly well due to the general hustle and bustle of the ward coupled with the horrendous thunder storms and the fact that I had to have a potassium drip through the night. Tomorrow looks as if it is going to be the day from hell. Not only do I have a skin biopsy on my foot to endure, the doctor also told me this morning that they want to take another bone marrow sample to see what's happening with my cells. Bone marrow biopsies are very uncomfortable and I found my last one particularly painful even after a local anaesthetic. For those of you keen to learn what this procedure involves, it is basically two needles in your pelvic bone. One needle pierces the bone and extracts bone marrow fluid while the second needle is twisted so that a sample of tissue can be taken - a bit like using one of those coring tools on an apple.

**Wednesday, July 24**  
I was extremely worried about what was in store for me today and so I'm glad it is behind me now. A constant feeling of nervousness is not pleasant and so now I am able to calm down and relax - a little. The day started with two bags of platelets and the cell-boosting drip ready for the multiple procedures I was going to have to endure. After a morning of anxiety I was collected by a porter

## Steve, has written a diary of challenges since her diagnosis

around lunchtime to go for my biopsy. It was decided that the biopsy wouldn't be taken from the rash on my feet but instead from the swelling around my last bone marrow test site, as this swelling is suspected to be caused by the same fungus/ bacteria which is responsible for the foot rash.

**Thursday, July 25**  
Another day of anxiety as I wait for the results of yesterday's bone marrow biopsy. This anxiety is further compounded today as I wait for news on my dad who is undergoing heart tests at the Queen's Hospital in Burton. Today was unique in that Stephen was my only visitor and he arrived earlier than normal as he tested the journey on the train to alleviate Birmingham's many road and tunnel closures. It was nice to spend six or more hours together even if it was just on the ward. My anxiety soon turned to pain and agony as the skin biopsy site from yesterday fired into life. The pain was horrendous and after paracetamol failed to make any mark whatsoever, I was put on codeine tablets. My temperature also took an upward spiral of 38.5 rising to 39 degrees by 10.30pm and 39.4 in the night. My blood pressure and pulse also climbed but these thankfully stabilised. My pulse at one stage was a throbbing 126bpm. Alongside a bag of platelets, two bags of potassium and the anti-fungal drip, I also went back onto some antibiotics which we stopped a few days ago - it is hoped these will sort out my sudden fever. My haemoglobin levels were better than usual today and so the two bags of blood I was allocated are on hold until tomorrow. Pain coupled with endless worry has left me drained today. Final thoughts again go to the fellow Burtonian who visited me last week as today they posted a nice card to the ward.

**Friday, July 26**  
Day 33 in hospital and it's time to pop the Champagne corks. For the past few days I have been working myself into a frenzy with worry. Readers of my diary will know that on Wednesday, I was sent for a fresh bone marrow biopsy. What readers didn't know is that the results were likely to be one of three scenarios: Scenario one would indicate that the chemotherapy had worked as hoped but my body was just taking a while to recover. Scenario two would indicate that the chemo had killed everything and a bone marrow transplant would be more urgent. And the third scenario would require the doctors to sit down with me to 'discuss the way forward'. Clearly scenario one is the most desirable, scenario two is acceptable but not ideal, and the third scenario doesn't warrant discussion. You can probably guess with the popping of Champagne corks that I fall into the first and most desirable scenario. My neutrophil count (a type of white cell) is now 0.1. After weeks of hitting zero every time, that one decimal point is equal to six lottery numbers. Furthermore, the bone marrow test failed to detect any remaining bad cells but the doctors will keep an eye on it as it is grown in a petri dish the lab. This good news puts my other bad news in the shade - but last night I had the worst night imaginable. I was practically cooking with a tem-



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perature of 39.4 and a pulse of 140bpm. The pain from the skin biopsy which needed 12 stitches was excruciating and my blood pressure and temperature results were so dire, the intensive care nurses were buzzed to give a second opinion. It's suspected that this skin biopsy site may be infected leading to my high pulse and high temperature. As a result, I am now on a cocktail of antibiotic drips along with endless bags of blood - three today. Not forgetting pain relief, anti-fungal drips and cell boosting drugs.

**Saturday, July 27**  
Yesterday was a Champagne celebration while today is back to reality. We were warned by the doctors yesterday that my neutrophil count was susceptible to going down as well as rising and therefore, my count today is back to zero. At least it stayed at 0.1 for a few hours proving that it can be done. Leaving the figures aside, the most important aspect is the bone marrow sample which is being monitored as it sits on a petri dish in the lab. What the scientists are searching for is evidence of remaining bad cells which have escaped the chemotherapy - thankfully, no bad cells have been found. I have been extremely tired today - I think it is the culmination of weeks without proper sleep, a few nights of feverish temperatures and a build-up of worry and anxiety. Not forgetting the ongoing pain caused from the skin biopsies. The codeine doesn't appear to be making a difference so I may have to opt for something stronger. I am trying to avoid the likes of morphine for as long as possible in the hope that the pain should subside on its own once the wound begins to heal. Until this happens, my back feels like it is being branded with a red hot poker continuously making it uncomfortable to sit, lie, walk or stand. My blood levels need a boost and so I needed a bag of platelets and two bags of blood as well as my staple diet of anti-fungal treatments, antibiotics and a bag or two of normal saline.

**Sunday, July 28**  
I'm a little bit like a yo-yo as one day my health is good and then the next it takes a tumble. The same can be said for my cell counts, they are rising, but again they are taking on a yo-yo formula with my counts over the past 24 hours bouncing between 0.2 and 0.1. The sore on my back is getting worse with now a red

inflamed area stretching beyond the realms of the dressing. The doctors prescribed me two more antibiotics to help combat this infection (taking my daily antibiotic tally up to five) and it was one of these which caused the yo-yoing of my health today. Less than an hour after taking this new tablet I felt nauseous and was finally sick. I am constantly impressed by the staff and doctors on my ward and today was no exception - within minutes I had two doctors and a team of nurses by my bed. Nothing is left to chance and the misguided belief that doctors only work Monday to Friday is certainly not the case in this ward. New drugs were immediately ordered (intravenous this time rather than tablet form) and I was put on a nil-by-mouth regime until Monday morning. Further blood tests were taken and I was given a dose of anti-sickness medication through my Hickman Line. I soon recovered from my nausea and then had the frustration of not being allowed anything to eat or drink. The celebration that my cell count has started to rise is short-lived as something else comes along to set me back a little. But I'm determined and by tomorrow I will have yo-yoed forward again. To aid my recovery I was also given two bags of platelets and a drip of tranexamic acid which is used to help clot the blood.

**Monday, July 29**  
Today marks the start of my sixth week at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, and despite my health taking on a yo-yo effect over the past couple of days, I now feel I am on the upward bounce rather than heading downwards. Since my new antibiotics have been switched to intravenous rather than tablet form, I haven't experienced the awful nausea I suffered yesterday and my temperature is now well under control. I am back on food and drink after being nil by mouth overnight following my sickness bout yesterday. The scientists in the lab have also worked their magic and have discovered exactly what is causing the infection around my skin biopsy site. As is usually the case with my conditions, this too is an extremely rare bacteria. I continue to be touched by the words of encouragement and support, and my latest round of appreciation goes to the team at Brownz Hair Salon in Horninglow who have offered their assistance with any future fund-raising events.

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## Take time to reflect as Katherine's leukaemia battle goes on

OVER the last weeks, we at the News Telegraph have made emotional appeals for help to you, our readers. Our front page appeal from editor, Stephen Sinfield, hit national headlines as he asked you to help save his wife, Katherine. Each week we have brought you stories of unsung heroes, who donate blood or bone marrow, who raise funds for charity or who have pledged support to our Take Five Minutes campaign. This week, as we publish the latest instalments of Katherine Sinfield's poignant diary, our thoughts are moving in a slightly different direction. We have all faced troubles over the last weeks and months. Uppermost in our minds are the sad deaths in Dig Street and at Bradley Wood, which have happened in our town over the week-end. Families have been plunged into shock and mourning and there is little comfort any of us can offer. Sad days lie ahead and as a community, we can sympathise with those who must face them. When death comes suddenly, the impact is devastating, the world seems to tilt on its axis and it is hard to understand why reality has not been suspended to mark the moment a life has come to an end. When death loiters on the edges of life, creeping and sneaking under doors in the night, hovering outside closed windows and lurking in shadows, the devastation is no less, it is simply of a different kind. Despair, mingled with hope, fear tempered by determination and the light of life flickering as it refuses to go out. We know that death comes to us all. But we know also that to give in to that knowledge cannot help us. Katherine is fighting for her life. We ask that for those who have known death in any of its many guises, that you too Take Five Minutes, not to research bone marrow donation, not to go and give blood, not even to think about Katherine in her hour of need. But just to remember those who have gone before and ask yourself, honestly, when I go, do I want to know I helped as many as I could while I had the chance?

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