

Husband hopes wife will soon be allowed home from hospital

Katherine's Diary — How she is trying to win her fight against leukaemia, in her own words

FRIDAY, JULY 12

THE day started busily and remained so for most of the morning.

Almost as soon as the 6am blood test was over, I was connected to my first bag of of A Positive blood of the day and given a dose of antibiotics.

As soon as breakfast was over, I was given a second blood test before it was time for the doctors' visit.

Progress is good but I am still neutropenic with zero white cells, meaning that I am going to be a resident at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham for a little while yet.

The doctors explained that I can expect to be on the fungal drip through my Hickman line for maybe another seven days, as this deals with a nodule discovered on my lung and the rash on my feet.

By 10am I was on my second bag of blood and my feet had been creamed with the new ointment and bandaged.

Just after lunch I was given more antibiotics and connected to my second fungal drip of the day.

Stephen and my father requested a visit with the doctor in charge of my care on the ward, and they were brought up to speed with progress and treatment plans.

The doctor explained that as soon as my cell counts start to rise, I will be allowed home for periods of time before returning for my second round of chemo, which is similar in duration to the first.

It is then a waiting game for my cells to rebuild for a second time.

Once a bone marrow match is found – they are still looking – I will return for a short but intensive week of chemotherapy to ensure I am completely clear of all bad cells before the transplant begins.

As my potassium levels are quite low, I have to take large dissolvable tablets – believe me, they taste disgusting.

No sooner had I finished tea before it was time to have more antibiotics, more cream and bandages on my ankles and the usual temperature and blood pressure checks.

SATURDAY, JULY 13

WHEREAS yesterday started busily, today looked as though it would end busily.

After the usual 6am blood tests and observations it wasn't long before the doctors arrived.

My rash is starting to clear and my temperature is now staying at normal levels.

I am still waiting for my blood cells to rise so that I can venture out. Anywhere would be nice, even the main hospital foyer would be an adventure after 20 days in the same ward.

To keep active and to give me a little exercise I have started to



walk up and down the ward corridor.

As my blood counts needed a little boost, I ended the day with two bags of blood.

SUNDAY, JULY 14

IT'S taken a while, but I am now fairly confident that my hair is starting to fall out.

It's not falling out by the handful, but loose strands of my long locks are starting to depart at fairly frequent intervals.

I may be lucky and it may just gradually start to thin, or it may fall out altogether – either way I have wigs, bandanas and hats at the ready.

My white cell count is now 0.2 so my body is gradually recovering from the chemotherapy and the counts are rising, which is good news for my hopes of being allowed to venture out of the ward.

MONDAY, JULY 15

AS my hair continues to shed by the handful, there is now no denying that I am losing my locks.

But as I have a plentiful supply, it is still going to be at least another week before the results are noticeable to the outside world.

My blood cell count hasn't increased since yesterday so I'm no closer to being allowed out in the sun – but at least the doctors are pleased with my progress overall.

The morning was fairly quiet so it gave me time to sort out bits and pieces and have a leisurely shower, without the need to rush for medicines.

I started my anti-fungal drip after lunch and this was followed by a bag of platelets.

Both of these made me very tired, but on the plus side the fungal drip and cream has worked wonders on the rash on my feet.

My temperature and pulse were slightly high when tested at 6pm, but this is probably down to the drug and blood infusions.

I also received good news late into the evening when I was told I could probably stop taking the potassium supplements from tomorrow.



PLEA . . . Katherine and Stephen Sinfield are pinning their hopes on finding a suitable donor for a bone marrow transplant.

by Mark McKay
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THE husband of a woman who needs a bone marrow transplant to save her life is hoping his wife will soon be well enough to come home.

Stephen Sinfield, a journalist for the Mail and editor of the Ashbourne News Telegraph, was told his wife, Katherine, had chronic myeloid leukaemia in April.

Since her diagnosis, Katherine, 32, has had blood transfusions, courses of antibiotics, drips and has undergone chemotherapy.

But despite the treatment, doctors have told her they cannot control her illness with drugs and her only hope of survival is a bone marrow transplant.

Stephen, 33, of Balfour Street, Burton, married Katherine in 2008. He now makes daily 70-mile round trips to be with by his wife's side in hospital, in Birmingham.

He told the Mail Katherine's white blood cell count, which currently stands at about 0.2, must rise to at least 0.8 before she is allowed out of the ward.

He said: "Katherine is doing okay. There has been no change in her cell count which means that she can't go outside and still can't leave the ward."

Katherine's white blood cell count must increase to between three and five before she is allowed home, Stephen said.

The normal white blood cell count should be between four and 11.

"Even when she is allowed home it will still mean trips to Burton for blood tests so it's not the holiday it sounds

like being," Stephen said.

"It will mean a lot of resting and she won't be allowed to see many people because her immune system will be low.

"We have been banned from going to shopping centres and anywhere where there will be a lot of people. We can't go out or into town."

Life on the ward must seem like a world away from the hustle and bustle of the class room, which as a reception class teacher, Katherine is used to.

"Katherine's biggest problem is the boredom and frustration at being stuck in the hospital ward for 13 weeks," Stephen said.

"It's difficult because I want her to come home as much as she wants to come home. But we both know that if she comes out too early she could put herself in serious danger.

"It makes it worse having had the good weather at the moment.

"We just hope that there's some summer left by the time she is allowed out."

The need for bone marrow transplants was highlighted at the weekend when Katherine's story made it into the national press.

"Lots of other people who have similar problems and are in the same position as Katherine," Stephen said.

"Katherine is the face of the campaign but every single blood donor or marrow donor will help someone in her position."

Only about 30 per cent of patients have relatives who are suitable donors.

For more information on how to become a bone marrow donor, call the National Blood Service Donor helpline on 0300 1232323.

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Stephen Sinfield