

Chilly Choice for Chemo Patients Leading to Lustrous Locks! Well Keeping Your Hair.....!

That moment of being told or realising yourself, that the next stage in managing your cancer is chemotherapy is yet another sickening moment along the journey towards overcoming cancer.

It's one of those moments that you never thought would happen to you anyway. Then there's that awful realisation that having gone through what you have already gone through, you are now about to lose your hair.

You've seen other people who have gone the journey before and managed to look great with wigs, scarves, smiles and a sense of humour. Like me you may have thought how brave they are and felt absolute empathy with them.

Well I don't do 'ill'! I suddenly realised when faced with chemo myself I didn't want people to think that I was ill because my hair was gone. In my case the cancer was gone and the chemo was 'belt and braces' to ensure that I live to a ripe old age because I have so many things yet to do in life!

I also wanted to continue to work through out my chemo. I'm a management consultant and trainer how could I arrive at my clients bald - I mean I'm not an eagle!? It's different if you work in an office and your colleagues are there supporting you or if you choose to take time off. But I love my work and I meet and work with groups of new people every week and I wanted to continue to do it and do it still with hair.

Almost the first thing the oncologist and chemo nurses said was to accept that I would lose my hair, but that of course that it would grow back. Probably an easy thing to say if you say it day in day out and you're a man with short hair that would grow back in a couple of months!

Well excuse me I had – and still have after completing chemo - shoulder length blonde hair.....

Although I trust our specialists and they do wonderful things, I also realise that they have to work within a system. As a determined and inquisitive type of woman I couldn't help but think how can it be that in 2006 I have to lose my hair – surely someone somewhere has come up with something that means I can get any cancer cells zapped and keep my hair....?

Enter the Paxman cooling cap.....

I heard about scalp cooling using gel caps and how it had been used for 30 years or so but that it was ineffective and that many people gave up using it if they started – I'm not surprised. However I found out about Paxman cooling caps.

A simple concept developed out of necessity by the ingenious Mr Paxman for his wife undergoing chemo. It's a cap, a bit like a jockey's helmet, that chills your head whilst having chemo which prevents the chemicals reaching the hair follicles. It doesn't work for everyone but for many it does meaning you keep about 80% of your hair which is enough for people not know. It's not exactly fun having your scalp chilled but it's OK and above all it gives us chemo patients choice....the choice of potentially keeping our hair or definitely losing it and choice is empowering.

I am passionate that us chemo patients should have that choice. Even if we have to pay for it as the NHS simply can't provide everything for everybody we should be made aware of that choice. Having said that many Trusts do offer private and NHS patients the Paxman scalp cooler,

I sit here with my hair now longer than ever and actually in far better condition than it's been in for decades! I feel like a human being, a woman, and my wonderful friends and family say I look great and throughout my chemo I 'got out there' and amazed my clients.

To Mr Paxman and his dear wife I send a million thank you's

Isobel Heaton