

At the age of 11 months I was diagnosed with bladder cancer, I managed to survive but it meant I could not pass urine like any normal boy could. The urine I produced had to be held in a urostomy bag since my tumour had caused so much damage that I did not have a fully functioning bladder.

I'm glad I don't remember any of the early stages as I was so young, however I did grow up with the effects of having the bag, which came more intruding when I reached my teenage years. As you could imagine, I didn't have much confidence taking off clothes, swimming or even just going out in general the sort of things young guys do.

When I was around 14/15 I met Mr Subramanian and he suggested that I could try a "button" placed where my bladder was and start a process known as "bladder cycling." This involved me inserting, via a syringe, saline water into my bladder in the hope that it would expand and grow to the size that would consider being suitable for a normal, healthy young man. I persisted with this process for about 10 months and it wasn't working for me, I just couldn't hold the water long enough for my bladder to expand naturally. In the end I only managed to hold around 130ml of saline for an hour which wouldn't be acceptable or fair on me.

This really put me back, as I thought I could do nothing else, that I had to stay with the bag for the rest of my life and I admit, it was a rough couple of months trying to come to terms with what life might be like in the future.

So you can imagine how elated I was when I once again talked to Mr Subramanian. He said that he could, only if I was happy with it, perform bladder reconstruction surgery on my bladder, this would also involve fitting a mitrofanoff. He explained that because he would be using some of my bowel tissue that mucus would be present in my bladder and that I would have to perform bladder washouts using catheters in order to get rid of it and also to drain urine from my bladder. He also explained that it would be a big operation, meaning I'd be in hospital for 2 weeks and in recovery for around 3 to 4 months. We had planned that this operation would take place in late June, literally weeks after I'd finished my AS exams.

So the time came round when I went into ward 15 at St James's hospital in Leeds for my operation. I was incredibly nervous that something might go wrong and also that I wouldn't still have a "normal" life even if things did work out well. Woke up after the operation, feeling rough as hell, with tubes here there and everywhere so despite that the operation was a huge success, those first 4 days were some of the hardest and roughest I have ever had in my life, I even had to learn how to stand up and walk again, since I'd lost movement in my legs from being laid down for a long period of time. But overall, after those few days, I felt good and confident that I was going to see this through and I would have a much better life by the end of it.

So the day comes when I get to go home, because I did so well I went home just over a week since I had the operation. I still was attached to a drainage bag that kept all urine out of my bladder to prevent infection whilst it was recovering from the surgery. Then after the first few weeks of rest I began to again train my newly repaired bladder to hold urine, but as you can imagine, the previous experience with bladder training did make me a bit apprehensive about the whole thing. But I just kept going, I knew I had to do

this in order for me to progress in the treatment, after all there is only a certain amount the doctors and nurses can do, most of it is down to you.

Within 2 weeks, something amazing happened, I began to hold around 300ml in my bladder which would be considered as nearly normal for a young adult male AND I was urinated through my penis for the first time in my whole life, I actually couldn't believe it was happening and neither could my parents or even my carers including Craig who's been there with me every step of the way. I was also urinating mucus out as well and when I eventually got rid of the temporary bags and started using catheters I found that little or no mucus was being brought back from my bladder!

A few months after I went for a ultrasound scan, this revealed that when I urinated, that as little as 5ml or urine was left in my bladder after I urinated. Which was phenomenal, my parents, Craig and Mr Subramanian couldn't believe that i'd done so well and come so far so soon after the operation. Baring in mind at this stage it was around 4 months down the line.

So now, a year has passed since my operation, im now 18 and finished my A-levels. I really don't know how to describe the change that this operation and treatment changed my life, it's truly amazing. I urinate just like any normal person but I still have to catheterise every night just to make sure no urine is left behind and I still carry out bladder wash outs every 2 to 3 days to keep my bladder free from mucus but it really is not a huge hinder in my life as you might expect it is. I do it at night, just before I go to bed for 20 minutes at most! I still use the ace stopper, which keeps my mitrofanoff open but compared to bag its miles better, it's clear and hardly anyone can see it! I now can go swimming, take my shirt off, wearing my shorts normally and go out and have great time without having to worry if my bags going to leak or whatever. Now that I don't have it holding me back I am much more confident, I now can tell all my friends what I've been through without feeling embarrassed, and they know my situation now and it really is nice to know people are completely cool with it!

I'm going this year's Leeds festival as I'm a big fan of music, I even have my own band and I have a really great job lined up in a recording studio for next year which I really can't wait for and I can do this knowing that I'm about as normal as any 18 year old boy can get!

So yeah, that's my story. I hope whoever is reading this, whether you're a patient going through what I did or a parent who's child is having done what I had, that its all about belief that you're going to be just fine, you're under the care of the best professionals in the world and if you believe in that and believe in yourself that you can do it and you will succeed and you will have a better life because of it.

Id like to thank hugely: Mr Subramanian, Craig, all the staff at Ward 15 at St James's, My parents and family and also my friends for the great amount of support they've given me and still are giving to me, I literally wouldn't be the person I am now without any of it.

Thank you,
Ryan