

Caring about cancer

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The Children's Hospital Trust
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CHOC
Childhood Cancer Foundation
South Africa

Childline

Children in Crisis
Toll-free Helpline:
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CHOC helps us understand the people that deal with cancer on a daily basis.

We asked cancer survivor, David Thrupp, a couple of questions about living with cancer and his battle with the disease. This is his story:

I am currently in Grade 7 at Bryneven Primary School. I am crazy about skateboarding. I love laughing and joking with my good friends.

I was diagnosed with stage 3b Rhabdomyosarcoma Alveolar (cancer of the muscle) a few days before I turned four. This type of cancer is very aggressive and it was quite advanced. I had a 60% chance of survival and this did not change for three years. My treatment lasted for two years. For the first eight months, I had intravenous chemotherapy (the drug treatment that kills cancer cells) for three days every three weeks and I was on a drip day and night. For the next sixteen months I had intravenous chemotherapy for five days every four weeks. I often had to have up to three blood transfusions on different days in the week following chemotherapy.

I will be forever grateful to the doctors in Ward 294 of the Johannesburg hospital who made sure that I got the very best possible treatment to kill my cancer cells. I know that many children with this kind of cancer have passed away. I thank God that I am alive today.

Was it difficult to keep up with schoolwork and did your friends and teachers help you?

I was not allowed to go to school at all for over two years while I was having chemotherapy and radiation treatment. When I did go to school after two years, the teacher and the students were very kind to me. Over the years my teachers have been very supportive.

Did you have a special diet and could you exercise?

I was not allowed to eat any food that was not fresh. I was not allowed to eat take-away foods, reheated foods or biltong. Any food that may have contained bacteria would have been very dangerous for me to eat because after chemotherapy my immunity would drop and I could easily have picked up infections. I often had mouth sores and they made it difficult, even impossible, for me to eat. When I was very ill, I would have a drip because I could not eat. One time, I had a very serious and deadly infection called septicaemia just after having chemotherapy and I did not eat at all for twelve days. But I also had many good days and I was encouraged to eat almost any food that I liked just to give me energy to fight my disease.



David Thrupp
13 years old



Did you feel different to other children?

When you have cancer treatment you lose your hair including your eyelashes and eyebrows. It does grow back when the treatment ends but it isn't easy to have no hair. Children stare, people talk about you and some adults even make rude comments. Some people are just so ignorant. I just wanted to be accepted and treated with respect. Being bald from cancer treatment actually means you are one of the bravest people around because you are fighting a deadly yet invisible disease.

How has CHOC helped you?

CHOC has been with me all the way since the first day I entered the hospital ward. CHOC volunteers offered support and gave advice to my parents. CHOC made the ward look so beautiful. The volunteers were at the hospital every day to let me paint, draw, listen to stories, laugh and bake on good days. CHOC introduced me to other children with the same disease and organised many activities for me. At Christmas time CHOC gave me presents and invited me to wonderful parties. For some children Christmas was extra special because they did not have long to live. There are many poor children who get cancer. CHOC raises funds for every child with cancer in South Africa so that even children with no money get the best possible treatment. Overall, seventy percent of children with cancer can be saved if they get the correct medical treatment on time. I still have to go to the hospital for check-ups and scans and CHOC still keeps in touch with me and supports me.

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South Africa
"Keeping more than hope alive"