

Cancer charity appeals for research funds

All charities are finding it difficult to raise funds during the pandemic, and now a neurosurgeon is backing an appeal which he says will give people with cancer more time with their loved ones.

Cancer Research UK says that its fundraising is projected to drop by £300 million in the next three years. This will put future research at risk.

Dr Michael Poon is a neurosurgeon and Cancer Research UK funded PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. He helps those who have brain tumours which is very hard to treat. He focuses in particular on glioblastoma, and wants to highlight the threat which the pandemic is posing to research breakthroughs.

He has teamed up with Heather Duff who was the face of the TV appeal by Cancer Research UK. Heather lives in Winchburgh and was diagnosed with a glioblastoma three years ago. Previously she had cervical cancer in 2014. So far she has had three bouts of surgery as well as chemotherapy and radiotherapy to deal with two brain tumours. She tells her story on the 30 second advert where she counts out her daily chemotherapy medication, chats on Zoom to loved ones and recuperates on the sofa alongside her miniature dachshunds., Pumpkin and Parsnip.

Heather is on a year-long course of the chemotherapy drug

temozolomide, which prevents cancer cells from making more DNA, stopping them from growing.

Cancer Research UK funded scientists led the development of temozolomide. From early pioneering lab work to the discovery, development and first clinical trials of the drug in people with cancer, Cancer Research UK researchers were involved every step of the way.

But to progress research takes money, and that is in short supply right now.

Heather said: "I understand the importance of Cancer Research UK's work all too clearly. I've had incredible support from my husband, friends and family and I treat every day as a gift.

"It's thanks to research and improved treatments that I've been given more precious time with my loved ones. It upsets me to think that progress that could help more people like me survive cancer in the future might be delayed because of the effects of the pandemic.

"Nobody wants to see scientists hanging up their lab coats, so I hope that people across Scotland will be inspired by the charity's determination to carry on beating cancer and give what they can. They could give hope to families like mine."

Dr Poon explained: "Brain tumours don't discriminate – they can affect anyone from any walk of life.

"To help people with this disease, we need to improve our understanding of the different types of brain tumour people can get. This knowledge could give people more time with their loved ones, by finding out which treatment is more likely to work for them.

"There is no doubt that COVID-19 has slowed down cancer research, and to know that the pandemic has reduced the funding available for research this year is deeply worrying.

Without support from Cancer Research UK, it will be difficult to carry on with our life-saving research in the years to come.

“My research could buy more time for people with brain tumours to make memories with their loved ones. That’s why I won’t stop fighting to improve care for people living with glioblastoma, but researchers like me need your help to continue to beat cancer.”

Graeme Sneddon, Cancer Research UK spokesperson for Scotland, said: “We’re grateful to Heather and Michael for helping to underline the power of research in saving lives.

“Cancer Research UK has played a role in developing 8 of the world’s top 10 cancer drugs and we’re working every day to find new ways to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease.

“The truth is, COVID-19 has slowed us down. But we will never stop. One in two people will get cancer in their lifetime*, which is why we are absolutely determined to continue to create better cancer treatments for tomorrow.

“Every step our scientists take towards beating cancer relies on our supporters. So, whether they donate or fundraise, with the help of people across Edinburgh and Lothian, we believe that together we will still beat cancer.”

Before the pandemic, Cancer Research UK was able to spend over £42 million in Scotland last year on some of the UK’s leading scientific and clinical research.

Donate now at cruk.org/give



Heather Duff