

# Sepsis awareness

## Case study: Bill Kearney

July 2017

February 2017 was when Stevenage resident Bill Kearney experienced a near fatal brush with sepsis, which is a rare but deadly response to infection. It was late February 2017, when the 63-year-old electrician came home and began to feel unwell.

As Bill says:

“It was Monday, 21 February and I had been at work as normal. But when I got back home, I began to start feeling like I was coming down with something. I was sitting on the couch watching TV and started to shiver a bit. So I told my wife that I was going to bed, unknowing what was about to unfold.”

He had a very rough night and first thing the next morning, Bill’s wife Debbie called their GP. When the doctor arrived, it didn’t take long for an ambulance to be called and soon Bill was in the Lister’s emergency department. What he did not know at that point was that Bill was suffering from what is called meningococcal bacteraemia – blood poisoning caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitides*.

Bill takes up the story:

“I have very little memory of that day’s events, as looking back I was clearly already exceptionally unwell. I was taken up to intensive care and put into an induced coma so that my treatment could start. It was the following Saturday, four days, later when I began to come around properly for the first time.

“My family were around me and all I could think of was *where am I, what has happened?* I could see how worried they looked – apparently they had been in and out for the last few days and must have been through hell watching me helplessly as the doctors and nurses fought the infection.

By the Sunday, Bill was well enough to be transferred to a side room on ward 6B at the Lister. He was still feeling pretty awful and was quite shocked when one of the doctors told him that he was lucky to be alive.

## 2/Case study: Bill Kearney

Bill said:

“What that doctor said really shook me – was that really the case? I then found out just how weak I was when I couldn’t even hold a small plastic beaker of water to drink from. But my family and friends said that they were amazed at my improvement – that made me think how awful things must have been during my time in intensive care.

“It wasn’t until the next day that a doctor explained in layman’s terms that I had contracted an infection that had got in to my blood stream. He told me that it wasn’t something that could have been predicted, it was just bad luck. Maybe I was a bit run down or something, but it certainly took hold of me in a big way – and so quickly. I had been fine that first morning, but less than 24 hours later I was fighting for my life.”

Over the next few days, Bill was determined to get back on his feet. The sepsis nurses had told him to prepare for a long and difficult recovery, perhaps over many weeks. But Bill had other ideas. He needed his eyes checked by the eye clinic team at the hospital, but to do that he had to be able to get in to a wheelchair. Despite all the odds (and advice), he managed that. Next it was walking with the aid of a zimmer frame, which meant that for the first time in days he could have a shower and shave.

Looking back, Bill said:

“It was after that first shower that I began to feel so much better, human again you could say. The nurses were fantastic, but bed baths are not the same thing at all! My physio was amazed at what I had achieved and once I demonstrated that I could climb stairs (our bathroom at home is on the first floor of our house), everyone agreed that I would be able to go home – which I did on Monday, 6 March, two weeks to the day since my ordeal began.”

Bill, who is self-employed, began to ease himself gently back to work that week, initially just contacting his clients and discussing jobs. It was to be some weeks later before he could begin physical work again.

### **3/Case study: Bill Kearney**

As Bill describes:

“I feel like I’m 98% recovered now, but I know that I can’t afford to overdo things. Part of that is my age, but this illness has given me a real wake-up call. I’m more aware now of when I need to rest, because I tire easier than before my illness. Family has always been important to me, but even more so now when I think about what I put them through.”

Bill, who has been given the all clear and was discharged from the care of the Lister’s doctors back in March 2017, is keen to share his message:

“In my case, there was no warning. One minute I was okay, the next I was lying on the flat of my back fighting an infection I have never heard of. To this day, there gaps in my memory. Slowly my family and I are coming to terms with what happened. I’m telling my story to help raise awareness of sepsis and the risk it poses. My wife Debbie did the right thing – she called our GP who in turn recognised just how unwell I had become. The ambulance took me to the Lister, where the care provided by the A&E, intensive care and ward 6B saved my life; they were all fantastic.

“I’m alive not just because of the incredible expertise of the Lister’s team in treating my infection, but because doctors and nurses suspected that I could have sepsis. Had that not been the case, then I may not have lived to tell this tale. It’s that awareness, from the GP to the hospital, that gave me a fighting chance.”