

STEPHEN'S STORY

"12 years ago, I thought my life was over.

Now I'm lead governor at the cancer centre that helped save my life"

Stephen Sanderson was a successful headteacher with a national role advising government when his world fell apart. What he'd thought was a simple sinus problem turned out to be a rare form of facial cancer and he wasn't sure he'd survive.

Yet 12 years later – after successful surgery and radiotherapy – Stephen has just been elected as senior governor at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust which helped save his life.

He represents patients and the public, playing a key role in choosing and scrutinising Board members, strategic plans and future developments, which all helps ensure patients continually receive the highest standard of care. "Every day, I think about how grateful I am that I'm still here and able to do this role," explains Stephen, 64, from Bowring Park in Liverpool.

"After surgery to remove the tumour and rebuild my face, I went to The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre for radiotherapy. I was going through something that had completely shut down my life as the headteacher at St Joan of Arc Primary School in Bootle. I didn't know if I'd survive. The way the staff at Clatterbridge dealt with me was so good; I got a realistic sense of what was going to happen and the chances of it working.

"The care I received was first-class and many thousands of people in our region have received the same fantastic support from Clatterbridge over the years, but you can't get complacent or take it for granted. As patients and local people, we need to make sure we have a say in its plans for the future.

"My own experience as a patient is a real motivation to make sure I do a good job of representing patients when the Trust is making key decisions – now, more than ever, with their plans for a new cancer hospital in Liverpool, transforming cancer care and refurbishing the Wirral site."

Stephen is calling on people across Merseyside and Cheshire to get involved and help shape The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre's future by becoming foundation trust members – it's free to join and that lets anyone aged 16 or over have a say.

"NHS foundation trusts are accountable to their members, represented by a council of elected governors," explains Stephen. "The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre is part of the local community so it's important that we, the people of Merseyside and Cheshire, help shape what they do and the services they provide to us.

"Members are consulted on plans for future development of the Trust and its services. They also elect people to represent them by serving on the Council of Governors and, if they like, can stand for election as a governor themselves.

"We're particularly keen for younger generations to get involved as foundation trust members, as well as those my age and older, because the decisions being made today will affect cancer care, research and services in years to come. Sadly, one in two people will develop cancer, so the chances are that most of us will have some contact with The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre, either as a patient or a friend or relative, during our lifetimes."

Stephen's decision to become a foundation trust member came after his own treatment at Clatterbridge and two years ago, he decided to stand for election as a governor representing Knowsley and St Helens.

He now chairs committees on finance and strategy, and represents governors and members at key meetings of the Trust Board. He is also senior member of the Council of Governors, which meets at least three times a year.

Wendy Williams, Chair of The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and a foundation trust member herself, said: "People like Stephen, our governors and our 5,500 members help us deliver great care day in, day out by giving views and suggestions that influence the decisions we make.

"This is a really exciting time for The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and our current and future patients. We're developing a new hospital in Liverpool that will truly transform cancer care for generations to come – and people from right across Merseyside and Cheshire can help us make it even better by becoming a foundation trust member now and providing your input, views and ideas."

Wendy Williams, Chair of The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust, said:

"The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre has developed a very inclusive approach to Governors. We decided very early on that transparency and involvement was the best way to work with our Governors. They attend every Board meeting for both part 1 and part 2, attend away days and sit on each committee of the Board, as well as doing patient safety walkarounds with non-executives and executive directors. A further extension to their responsibilities is for them to see all patient complaints at their own committees – patient details are redacted but the rest of the information is in full.

"When Stephen was appointed as Lead Governor in 2015, he was keen to evolve the role further. At our monthly one-to-one meetings, Stephen and I work through currently pressing issues in the hospital and think through whether there could be a need to review the programme of Governor meetings. We also have to consider the ever-present need to recruit these valued people. We have found that many new governors are unclear about their role initially, so at our Annual Members Meeting we brainstormed the areas of our strategy which the Governors felt were of greatest importance. These have now been set as objectives for the year and each of the Governor committees regularly review whether they have the right information to assess if we are on target to achieve them.

"Stephen's style is perfect for the Lead Governor. His contribution provides a valuable insight into the Board. He speaks from a previous patient perspective, as a member of the public and as a Governor – not forgetting his extensive professional experience."