

Coming back strong on the other side of cancer

By LUCY HAINES

When 66 year-old Adam Brown noticed a canker sore on his tongue four years ago, he thought nothing of it. The active Edmonton sales manager wasn't ill, and he had not long since hiked Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro and the notoriously difficult Machu Picchu Trail in Peru. So having a walk-in clinic doctor say the sore on his tongue looked like a cancer—well, it was the last thing he expected to hear.

"I wasn't a smoker and I didn't have HPV (Human Papilloma virus), two of the main causes of tongue cancer, so I was in shock. I underwent surgery before I even realized what it might mean," said Brown, who had to relearn to talk and swallow after a 14-hour surgery that saw half of his tongue removed and replaced with tissue from his arm. "The surgery and 30 days of radiation was brutal, but the Cross staff was always so patient. And after you've completed treatment and you ring the bell at the Cross—that's

something I'll always remember."

Tongue cancer is rare, with fewer than 10,000 cases per year in Canada. Symptoms include a persistent sore on the tongue, sore throat and changes in the voice. Difficulty swallowing, chewing and moving the jaw or tongue are also markers.

Brown said that difficulty speaking and swallowing after surgery and radiation is a challenge for most everyone who develops tongue cancer—taste is affected as well and teeth may rot prematurely from treatment—but for him, the subsequent physical therapies and emotional/social supports he's received have been a blessing. He credits resources such as Wellspring and ACE, the Alberta Cancer Exercise Program (both are available in Edmonton and Calgary), with providing all the non-medical care a cancer patient may need.

"Aberta is blessed with so many resources for cancer patients. I can do yoga, meditation or soap stone carving at Wellspring, and I'm grateful for the encouragement that the



Photo supplied by Adam Brown

Cancer survivor Adam Brown makes activity an essential part of his post-treatment lifestyle.

exercise program offers specifically for each type of cancer. For me it hasn't just taken a village, it's taken a city," said Brown, who is now part

of a head and neck cancer support group, and a speaker at the U of A's department of rehabilitation medicine. "Cancer has changed my life, and I'm a better person because of it. It has made me want to give back to those who've helped me."

The Alberta Cancer Exercise program helps individuals with cancer better withstand and recover from cancer treatment. ACE is a free 12-week community-based exercise program designed specifically for individuals undergoing or recovering from cancer treatment.

The Canadian Medical Association Journal reports that of new diagnoses of cancer in 2020, most will affect Canadians aged 50 and older. Cases of lung cancer are expected to top the list, followed closely by breast cancer, colorectal cancer and prostate cancer. Together, these cancers account for nearly half of all new cancer cases. Overall, data shows that 63 per cent of Canadians with cancer are expected to survive for five years or more after their diagnosis.

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COVID-19 INFORMATION

HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD



Self-isolate if sick



Wash hands frequently



Practice social distancing



Cover coughs and sneezes



Keep surfaces clean