

***Email written to the Joe Duffy's 'Liveline' program on RTE Radio One in January 2007 by Susie Long using the pseudonym 'Rosie'.***

Dear Joe,

Today I had my 12th session of chemo. I got to talking to the partner of a man who was also getting chemo. She told me that when her partner's GP requested a colonoscopy for him he was put on the waiting list. She then phoned the hospital and told them he had private health insurance and he was seen three days later. He had bowel cancer that was advanced, but had not broken through the bowel wall and spread to other organs. She said the tumour was the size of a fist and what made him go to the doctor was he started to lose weight rapidly. Thank goodness they got it in time and he's going to recover.

I then came home, flicked on the TV and got into bed. The first ad on the TV was from the government telling people that bowel cancer can kill, but not if caught in time. If Bertie Ahern or Mary Harney or Michael McDowell were within reach I would have killed them. Literally. I'm not joking. I don't have private health insurance.

In 2005, I got a lot of diarrhoea and after a few months it became constant and blood accompanied some of my bowel movements. I went to my GP clinic in the summer of 2005. The GP immediately sent a letter to the local hospital requesting a sonogram and a colonoscopy. Within weeks I was called for a sonogram and was diagnosed with gallstones. I expected to soon be called for the colonoscopy. I waited through the autumn, then through the start of winter. No word on the colonoscopy and no word on when my gall bladder would be removed.

In November I started to get serious lower abdominal pain after eating. I phoned and was assured I would be called soon. In December I started to rapidly lose weight. I phoned the hospital again after Christmas. Again I was told that I was still on the list and would definitely be called soon. Joe, from November to the end of February I was in agony. Apart from the pain and diarrhoea I was tired all the time.

Finally, on February 28, 2006, four days after I turned 40, I was called for a colonoscopy. I woke up in the middle of the procedure and saw on a large screen, them probing a blob on my colon. They were taking a biopsy. But I didn't have to wait for the results. I knew what I had.

I was booked in for surgery to remove the tumour. I was in St Lukes hospital for over 50 days last year. Recovery was hard, but I did it. In March, in between surgeries, I was sent to the Mater in Dublin and had a PET Scan to see if the cancer had spread. If it hadn't, I'd live. If it had spread to other organs, I'd die. It had spread to my lungs.

I felt bad enough to go to the doctor. She did what she was supposed to do. She told them I had diarrhoea and blood from my rectum. But what could they do? So do lots of people. Should I have skipped the list ahead of those other people with the same symptoms? I don't think so. Should there be a list so long that it puts people at risk of dying? No definitely not.

I know in my heart and soul that when I started to feel really, really bad, especially in from December to February 2006, is when the cancer broke through the wall of my bowel. Of course I can't prove it. But I know. Because it broke through the bowel I have been given two to four years from diagnosis to live. The chemo is to prolong life, not to save it. I have three

years, tops, to go. Despite that, I'm going to try my best to make it for five more til my youngest turns 18. He needs me too much now.

My husband has suffered right along side of me in his own way knowing that the woman he loves will be dead soon. My 18 year old daughter has been told and has gone quiet and doesn't want to talk about it. But I know she's scared. I haven't told my 13 year old son yet. He's too young to handle it.

I don't blame the wonderful people who work in St. Lukes in Kilkenny. St. Lukes has the best A&E unit in the country. What did the government do? Threaten to shut it down. They also threatened to shut down the maternity unit AFTER spending millions to improve it!

My time in the Mater was dreadful. I was terrified I'd pick up MRSA because it was filthy. I was put on a ward with cardiac patients, mostly men, who because of their ill health were unable to aim too well when they went to the toilet. Once when I used the toilet my pajama bottoms soaked up urine up to my ankles. There was excrement stuck to the sides of the toilet for days at a time.

Today, when I heard that a very nice man who was in the same, if not worse condition, than me when he went to his GP is going to live because he had private health insurance and I'm going to die because I didn't, I had to bite my tongue. I'm happy he's going to live. He deserves to live. But so do I. Then I came home and watched that ad which told people to hurry up and get checked out for bowel cancer because it will save their lives, and I fucking lost it.

The health service has been in the hands of Fianna Fail and the PD's for years and all they can think to do is put resources into privatisation. But it's not just the politicians. I'm also angry at every single voter who voted for Fianna Fail and the PDs because they thought they'd get a few more shillings in their pockets but were too greedy and stupid to realise that that money they saved in wage taxes would be made up with stealth taxes. We all knew before the last election what their health policies were and the majority of people ignored this and voted for them anyway.

I'm writing to you because the way this country is run leads me to believe that contacting a radio show is the only way to try to change things like this. I hope that when Ms. SUV and Mr. Builder goes into the voting booth, they'll think about me, my husband and especially my children.

Despite 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> incomes we couldn't afford VHI or Bupa. But even if we could have we wouldn't have gotten it because we believed (and still do) that all people should get good care despite their incomes. We thought jumping queues was wrong. We're socialists... just like Bertie. Ha Ha. Now I feel like vomiting and it's not the chemo!

- Rosie