

https://www.aberdeennews.com/news/local/rare-cancer-takes-voice-box-but-not-voice-of-roncalli/article_05bc7b96-ba47-5cb8-adb4-23c0faa634ec.html

FEATURED

Rare cancer takes voice box, but not voice, of Roncalli counselor

By Shannon Marvel smarvel@aberdeennews.com Feb 20, 2017



Even though he's never smoked, a rare form of throat cancer caused Dan Wold to lose his larynx. He uses an electrolarynx to speak. He and his wife, Cheryl, live in Aberdeen. American News Photo by John Davis taken 2/11/2017

Despite never being a smoker, a Roncalli Junior High counselor and coach was diagnosed last year with a rare throat cancer that has now spread to his lungs.

Dan Wold, 50, has since had his voice box removed and now speaks through a digital device, which has taken some getting use to.

"I had to learn how to use this for one thing," Wold said, gesturing toward the small, handheld device he presses to his throat whenever he speaks.

"Trying to use it at work or just going somewhere and trying to order something, or talking on the phone — that's actually a bigger challenge than talking in person," Wold said.

But there are more daunting challenges to come.

Wold said chances of his cancer going into remission are slim. But even with an uncertain future, he plans to make the best of his situation.

He said the most difficult part of learning how to communicate with the electrolarynx was avoiding short and simple responses.

"It's just a lot of practice on your own doing a lot of the difficult sounds. It's tough to say my name and my birth date because it's too short. I do a sentence or I put it in context to make it easier to understand," Wold said.

Ann Falken, a speech and language pathologist for Avera St. Luke's Hospital, has helped Wold learn how to use his voice again.

"Dan was very motivated and was able to teach himself a lot, but he also took every suggestion you gave him and ran with it," Falken said.

"He is a very animated person. Most people talk too quickly, and we really have to concentrate on the enunciations of the sounds," she said.

The number of patients Falken sees who have had their voice box removed is low, she said.

"This is not something that is a high incident in Aberdeen. We have as many as two of them every year," Falken said.

The number of people diagnosed with the type of throat cancer Wold has is even lower.

"He works with the Teens Against Tobacco Use group, then he also manages a grant for the area that does a lot with anti-tobacco, so it's a bit ironic that he would develop such a rare cancer that is mainly found in smokers when he's never been a smoker," said his wife, Cheryl Wold.

"Right now, there has been a campaign on television where there is a person with a laryngectomy and the person had been a smoker, so Dan has had people ask him, 'Hey have you gotten that from smoking?'" she said.

A little over a year ago, Dan Wold went to see his general practitioner after suffering from a scratchy throat and voice volume problems. He said he was told that since he had never been a smoker and regularly exercised, the symptoms were likely caused by acid reflux.

The instinctual feeling that it was something more is why he sought a second opinion from an ear, nose and throat doctor, who immediately saw a mass in his throat.

Cheryl Wold said that the type of cancer her husband has is normally found in people who have smoked for a long time or used alcohol heavily.

"Dan hasn't used alcohol in over 28 years," she said.

"The rarity of the cancer, when we checked with another big cancer treatment center in the United States, they said that in the last 40 years they've had 31 cases of this particular type of cancer," she said.

When Dan Wold is asked whether smoking caused his cancer and the removal of his voice box, he takes the question in stride.

"I just answer their question and move on. It's whatever. The thing is, so if I had been a smoker, well what are they saying?" he said.

"I'm against smoking, but no one deserves this. It doesn't matter if you smoke or not, it doesn't matter if you've made bad decisions about your health care or what you do all the time. For the most part, it never comes back to affect them. So it's not like if I had been a smoker I would say, 'Well yeah I deserve it,'" Wold said. "It would explain it, but it wouldn't change anything really."

Follow @smarvel_AAN on Twitter.



Our Voice: Inspiring story proves that we should be living our best lives daily

Problems. We all have them, and many of us think our problems are overwhelming. One thing that can make us rethink that is when we remember those dealing with serious illnesses, or even terminal ones. And what about the young among us who are fightin