

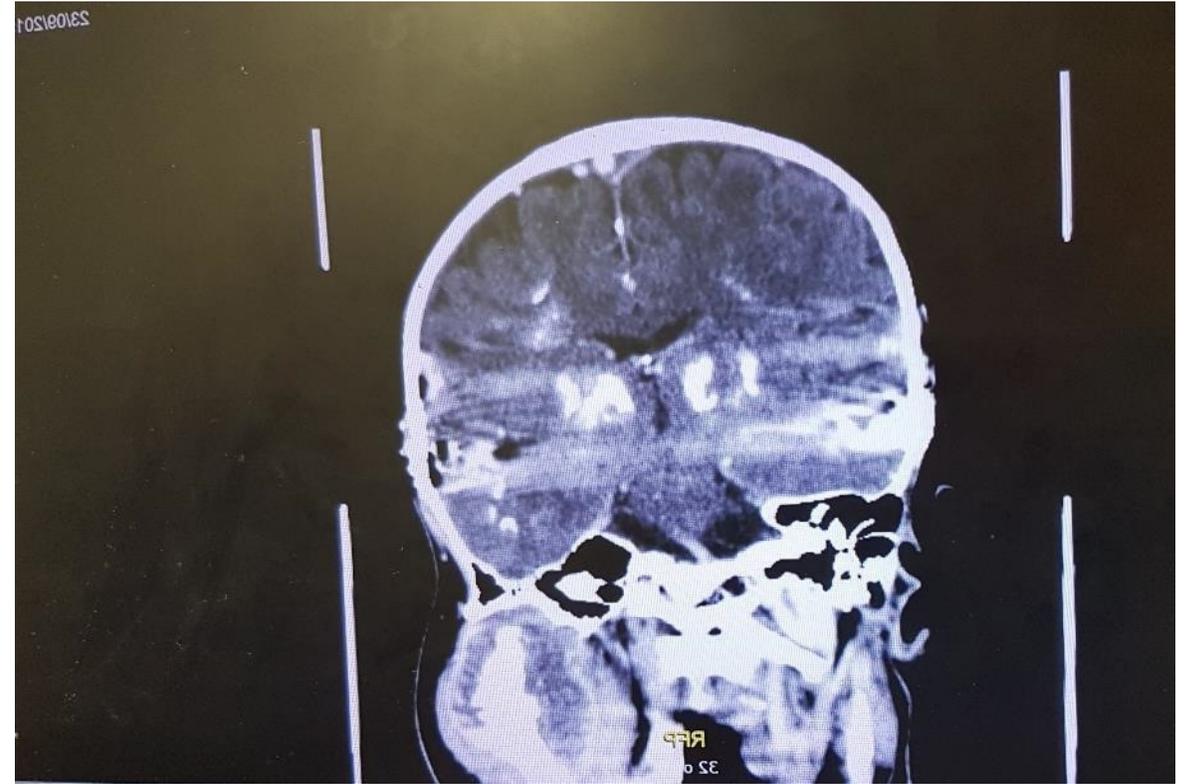


Rory Gardiner's journey with Osteosarcoma

On 16th September 2019 my big brother Sam noticed a large hard lump on the left-hand side of my face by my ear.

No one else had noticed it.

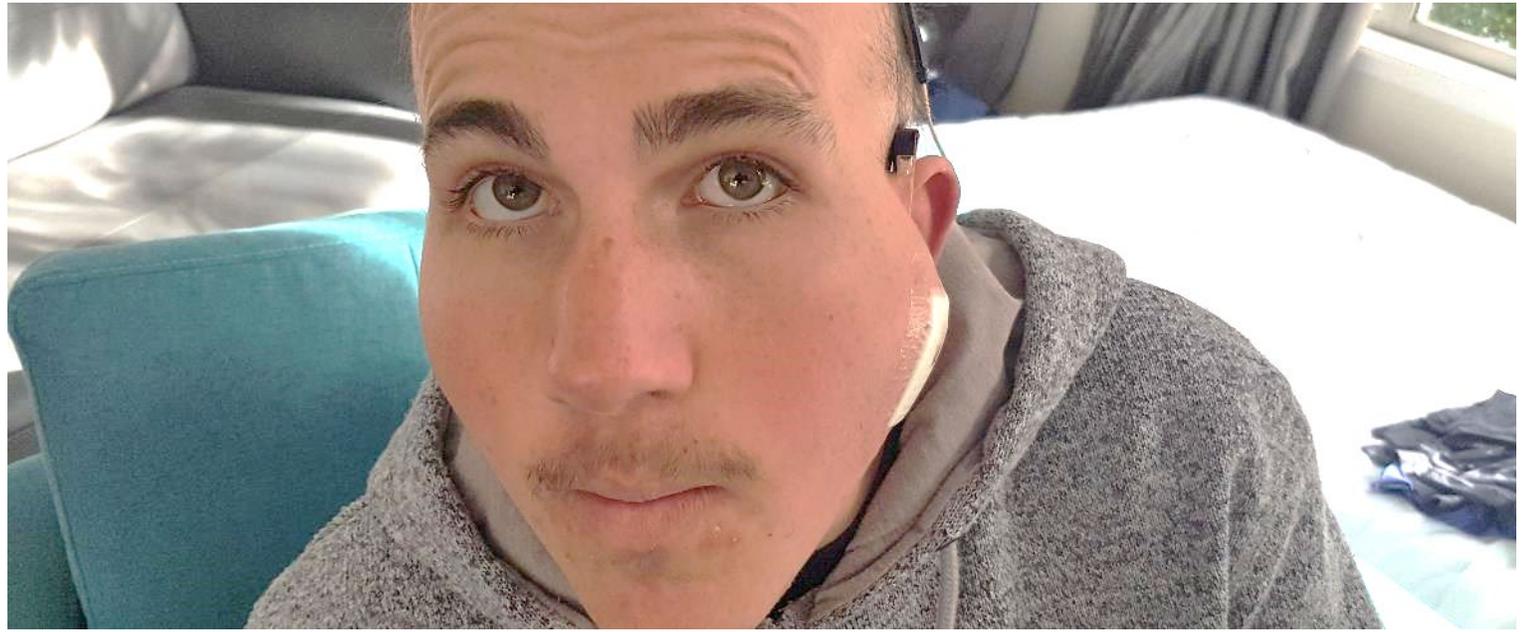
We did not know what it was or how long it had been there



A CT scan was done at Taranaki Base Hospital on 23rd September. The Doctors told us the lump was a 5x5cm tumor.

I was upset and scared because I have had cancer before. I had Medulloblastoma (brain cancer) when I was 7. I endured nine months of treatment.

All of my disabilities are caused by the brain cancer and its treatment.

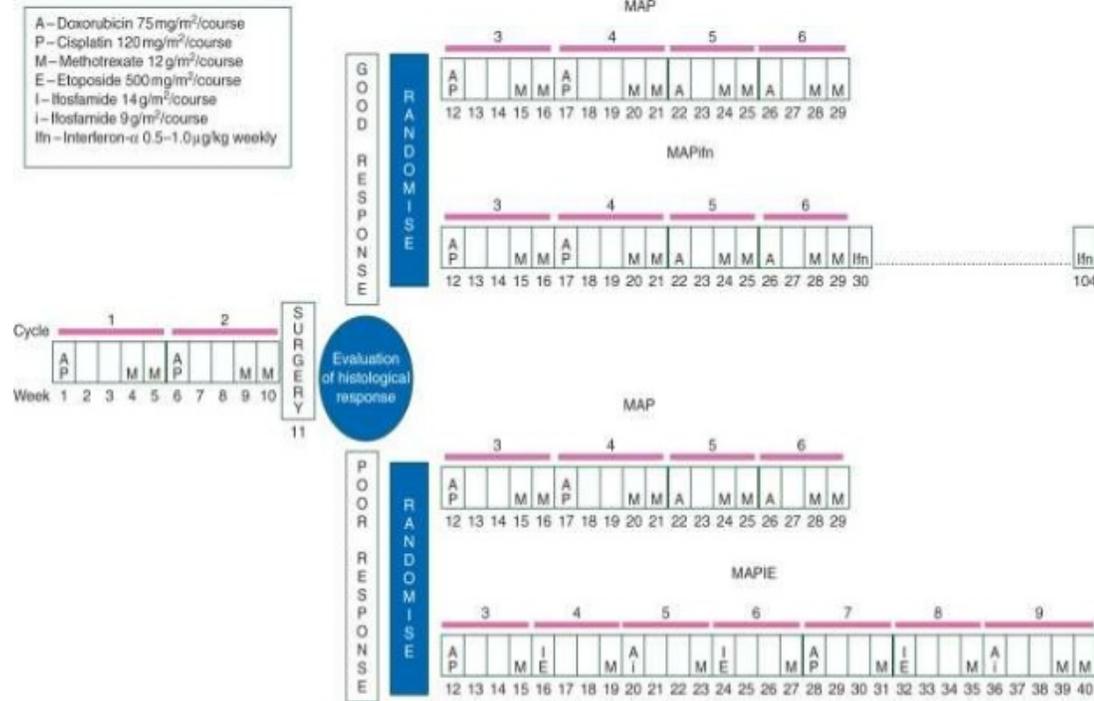


At Starship Hospital in Auckland they did a biopsy.
On the 27th of September 2019 we found out the tumor was
Chondroblastic osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer.
The tumor was in my left lower mandible (jaw).

The Doctors think it was caused by the high dose radiation
therapy I received to treat Medulloblastoma.



In Auckland I had a full body PET scan to see if there was evidence of cancer elsewhere in my body.
I was lucky there wasn't.



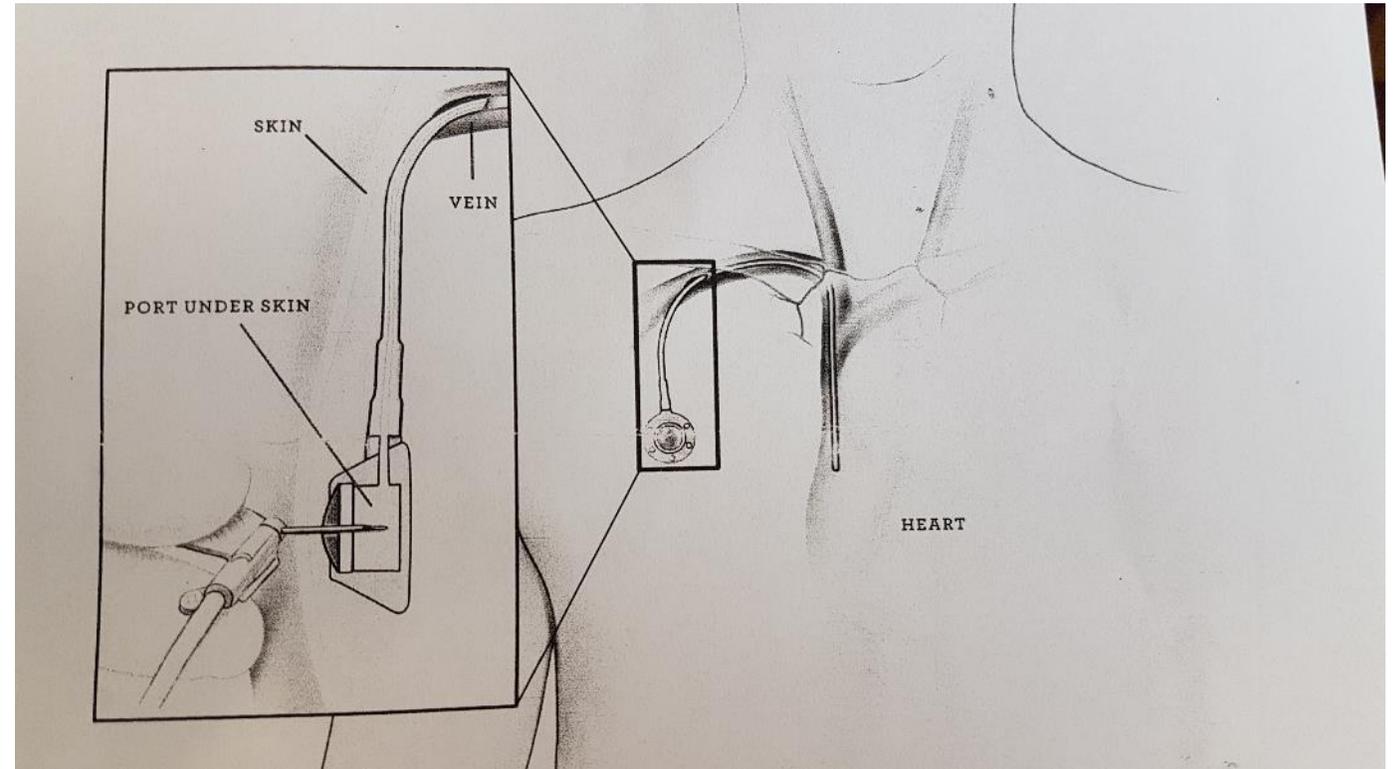
The MAP chemotherapy protocol is named after the drugs which are given. Treatment lasts for 29 weeks, but there are always delays as your body takes time to recover. Surgery to remove the tumor, if this is possible, occurs in week 11.



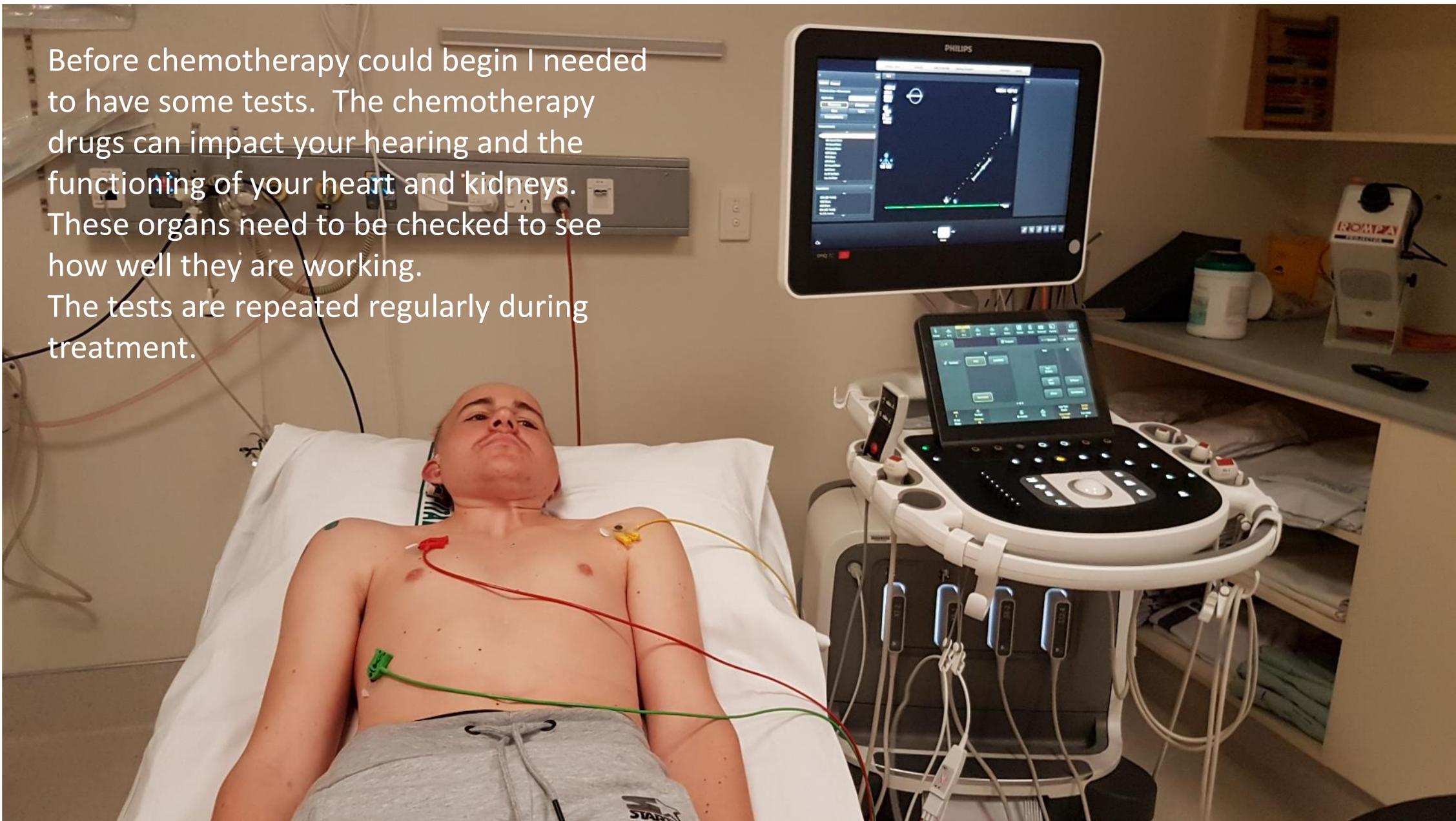
Dr Stephen supervised my treatment. He was my Oncologist the first time I had cancer. I have known him for 11 years. He was assisted by AYA (Adolescent and Young Adult) Nurse Specialist Tracey. They explained the treatment plan for osteosarcoma.

I had an operation to insert a port-a-cath into my chest. It is threaded into a large vein above the right-hand side of my heart.

The port is used to give; intra-venous fluids, chemotherapy, medication and blood transfusions.



Before chemotherapy could begin I needed to have some tests. The chemotherapy drugs can impact your hearing and the functioning of your heart and kidneys. These organs need to be checked to see how well they are working. The tests are repeated regularly during treatment.





Chemotherapy started on 2nd of October 2019.

I was an inpatient in Starship Hospital each time I received the chemotherapy drugs.

The longest stay was for methotrexate which takes five days to clear from my body.

I was given other medication to protect my body and to relieve side effects such as nausea, vomiting, ulcers, pain and weight changes.

My family supported me during my treatment.
They made sure I was never alone.





Family, friends, neighbours, strangers and community organisations gave generously to our family without being asked, often on several occasions, to help make our lives easier so we could keep fighting.

We appreciate their love and support.

I got a break from cancer treatment at the end of December 2019 so I was able to go home to celebrate my brother Colt's 9th birthday, Christmas and my Nana and Poppa Honnor's 50th wedding anniversary.



On 8th January 2020 I underwent an 11.5 hour operation to remove the tumor and reconstruct the left hand side of my lower jaw.

My left leg was the donor site for reconstruction.

I was in DCCM (intensive care) at Auckland Hospital for three days.



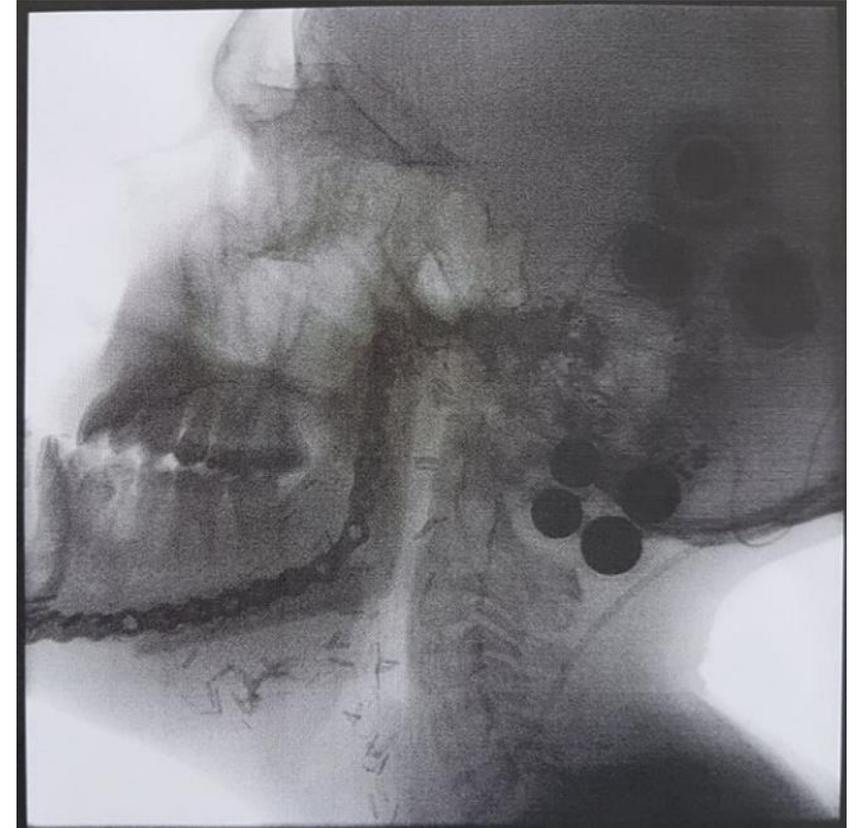


After the surgery there was a lot of swelling. While they healed each wound drained fluid into a bottle. In the left-hand side of my neck were two electrodes which monitored the blood flow in the rebuilt side of my face. I received nutrition via an NG tube. I was not allowed to eat or drink. I struggled to talk. My speech was garbled and slurred. No one could understand me. My left leg was in a cast and moon boot. I wasn't allowed to stand. I was on a lot of medication.





As part of my recovery I needed rehabilitation to eat, speak and walk again. Gradually the wounds healed. I was discharged after two weeks in Auckland Hospital.





This is the great surgical team.
ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat) surgeon Dr Nick removed the tumor and Dr Ilia reconstructed my left lower jaw.
They managed to remove all the tumor with very narrow clear margins.
They reconstructed my jaw so well I can eat most food and talk.

One month after surgery chemotherapy started again.

It was supposed to last 18 weeks but took 21 to complete.

My body took longer to recover between doses. I had several blood transfusions and my body went into adrenal crisis five times.

It was hard to keep going. I didn't want to be in the hospital anymore. I tried to stay strong.

I talked to Dr Kath and she helped me cope and carry on with treatment.





To keep my spirits up my family took me into the outdoors. I like the freedom and to feel the sun and wind on my face.

We received grants from the Halberg Foundation, George Mason Charitable Trust and a local Taranaki funder to purchase a Hippocampe All Terrain Chair so we could explore more places together.





I found happiness in building lego, being at Inglewood High and receiving visits from special people.

In June I got to have a special experience. I was able to name a teenage male Western brown kiwi. He weighed 1.9kg and was feisty.

I named him The Hulk. I have always found inspiration in superheroes and green is my favourite colour. I have a tattoo of The Hulk. The Hulk symbolises strength, stamina and the ability to heal. I hope by giving the kiwi this name he will have ability to survive and thrive no matter what he encounters in life.

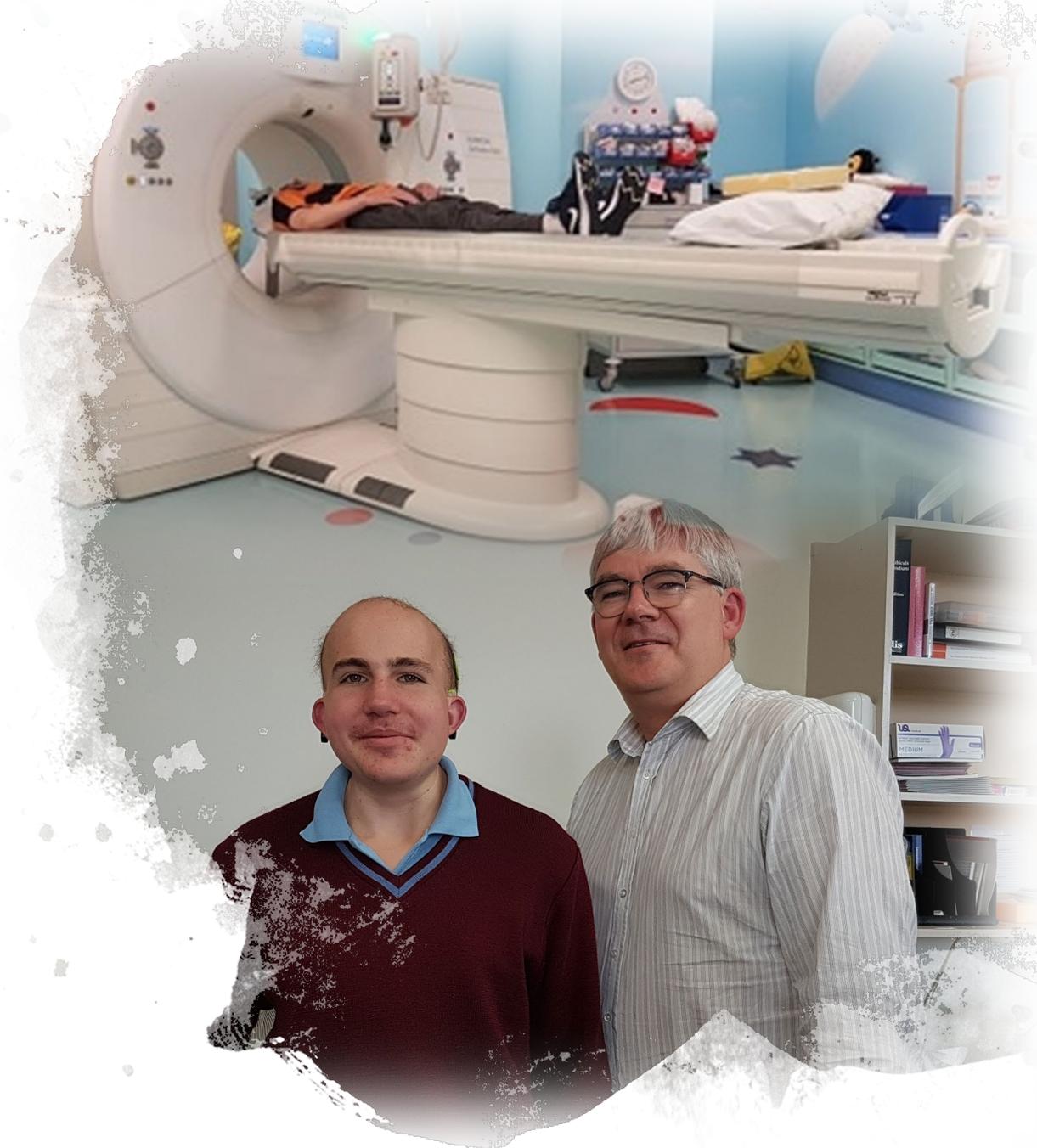
The Hulk was moved from the predator free sanctuary at Rotokare to a native forest called the Totara Block where predator control is being undertaken by Forest and Bird volunteers.



My end of treatment CT scan on 23rd June 2020 was NED (no evidence of disease) = clear of cancer.

I am officially in remission for osteosarcoma.

- We are all very happy.
- Dr Stephen helped me achieve remission from cancer for a second time in 18 years.
- *(this is us together in 2018)*



It was wonderful to finish treatment and finally be home to stay.

However, my journey continues with recovery and rehabilitation.

I need:

- CT scans every 3 months to detect any reoccurrence.
- Surgical removal of the port.
- IV antibiotics for another 3-4 months to protect me against pneumonia.
- Re-immunization because chemotherapy has cancelled all my prior immunisations.
- Extensive physiotherapy
- Re-integration into high school guided by my level of fatigue.





I am a cancer survivor. I hope to stay that way.

Thank you to everyone who has done something to support our family over the last 9.5 months. Your love and generosity have meant we could put all our energy into fighting cancer.



Thank you to the community organisations who have supported us and Kiwi families during their toughest times.



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