

A Ringing Victory for Cancer Patients Who Meet a Milestone

When Bruce Mooney was diagnosed with colon cancer in April 2012, his first thought was that he was going to die. A good friend of his had died of colon cancer in 2002, and he thought he knew what to expect.

His wife, Colleen, let him have a day to feel sorry for himself. But then she gave him some perspective: How could his daughters, just 13 and 15 years old, have hope if he didn't?

Mooney, 47, agreed. He decided to focus on taking action. His cancer was found to be stage II, and his medical team helped him forge a treatment plan: 27 radiation treatments to shrink the tumor, with concurrent chemotherapy to reduce it even more; then surgery, then six months of chemotherapy. Having a plan gave clarity to what had felt like an unknown.

Still, "going in for my first treatment, I was very anxious," Mooney said. "But it wasn't as bad as I had thought it would be."

Being in treatment meant Mooney spent a lot of time at Peninsula Regional Medical Center's Richard A. Henson Cancer Institute. "I feel very fortunate to live in Salisbury, and I don't have to go to Baltimore for these treatments," he said. "Everyone here is very friendly and helpful, and I don't have to go to several places for chemo and radiation."

He encourages anyone who faces a similar diagnosis to ask lots of questions to dispel that fear of the unknown. "The people here are angels. They'll help you. Use those professionals for what they're for," he advises.

About two weeks after the start of his radiation, Mooney noticed a bell on the wall of the Henson waiting room. It was there for radiation patients to ring at the completion of their treatment. When he found out what it was for, he couldn't wait for his turn to ring it.

On June 14, 2012, Mooney finally got his chance. Although it was just the first step in a three-part effort to beat cancer, he said it felt good to pass that milestone. When he pulled the rope on the bell, sending its ringing tones throughout the waiting room, he couldn't hold back a smile.

"I am extremely excited about Phase 1 being over," he said.



Bruce Mooney of Salisbury celebrates the end of his radiation treatment by ringing a bell at PRMC's Richard A. Henson Cancer Institute.

Behind the Bell



Warren Wilson, a radiation therapist at Peninsula Regional Medical Center's Richard A. Henson Cancer Institute, has seen many people go through radiation treatments, and he thought patients should have something to look forward to. "Some hospitals have graduation ceremonies, some give out certificates," he said.

And in fact, PRMC patients do get a certificate, too. But he envisioned the cathartic effect of a bell – musical peals that would announce the completion of a major phase in many cancer patients' journeys. His idea was accepted, and a bell was installed in the Henson waiting room in April 2012.

Since then, he's been able to see many patients ring it. "Some people get emotional; some are timid, some are excited," Wilson said. "But they all look forward to it. It's a victory bell."