

# My niggly stomach pain... and a wrong diagnosis

Jane Aylott, 55, writes about the intermittent pain that kept sending her back to the GP, and the cancer most of us have never heard about



**J**ane, who works in research administration, lives in Essex with her husband, George. They have three adult children, Charlotte, Joe and Sam. In February this year she was diagnosed with a neuroendocrine tumour (NET), a cancer that was thought to be rare, but is now being discovered more often.

The nagging stomach pain that sent me repeatedly to the GPs over four years came and went but was always on my left side and in the same place. Various GPs examined me but none could find anything sinister. Probably reflux or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), was the likely verdict. I was still worried though because the pain was quite insistent, so I kept going back.

As so often happens at my age, they thought the problem might be gynaecological. After various tests and scans I ended up having a hysterectomy because of an ovarian cyst and heavy periods, but this still didn't cure my stomach pains or assuage my worries.

As part of these investigations, I was sent for an abdominal scan at my local hospital in March last year where an eagle-eyed radiographer spotted "something on the liver". Probably nothing, she said, something I was born with, a "haemangioma". I went home and googled it and was not unduly concerned as haemangiomas are sort of internal birthmarks.

A few months later however, I fainted on the train to work. It had never happened before and quite alarmed me. The GP sent me to see a colorectal consultant and following another scan the consultant found some "irregularities" – tiny blockages in my spleen and gastric system – which I now know were markers

for my cancer, but nothing was said to me at this point. The consultant missed the NET. This time, however, my GP referred me to a gastroenterologist at Whipps Cross University Hospital and I was eventually seen in January this year.

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At this point, despite reassurances that it wasn't cancer, I was becoming concerned. Something wasn't right and no one was getting to the bottom of it.

Doctors are taught that when they hear hoof beats, suspect horses not zebras. Well, sometimes it is a zebra.

Unbeknown to me, the scan was reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) who suspected more and quickly arranged a biopsy for me. I knew then that cancer was a possibility, but I felt >>

